

QUALIFIED BUT NOT WILLING: THE PROBLEM WITH
RECRUITING SUPERINTENDENTS IN IOWA

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By Elaine Lagomarsino Smith
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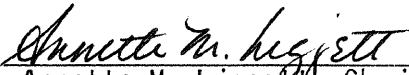
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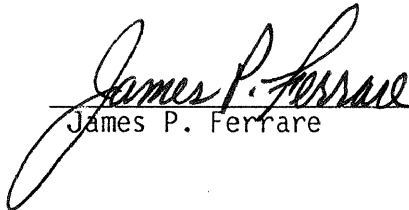
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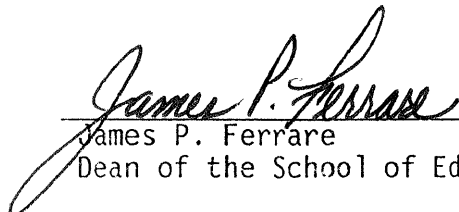
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An Abstract of a Dissertation by
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The problem. The problem of this study was to find out how many people held a valid Pre K-12 superintendent endorsement in the State of Iowa during the 1996-97 calendar year, but who were not currently serving as a superintendent in the state, to determine whether or not any of these people were seeking a superintendent position, and to find out what they considered to be attractive or not attractive about serving as a Pre K-12 school superintendent.

Procedures. Data was collected through three sources: conversational interviews with educational leaders of the state, a survey of the superintendent endorsed population, and focus group forums with selected survey respondents. Descriptive statistics were used to report findings from the survey. Qualitative research methodology was used in analyzing information from the three sources and for deriving conclusions of the study.

Findings. Four research questions guided this study. The findings addressing those questions are: (a) There were 315 people endorsed to be a school superintendent in Iowa in 1996-97 who were not serving as a superintendent; (b) Sixty percent of the endorsed population was not seeking a superintendent's position at the time of this study; (c) For those seeking or considering a position six barriers or conditions were identified as influencing their decision to apply: satisfaction with their current position, negative impact on their family life, too political an arena, high stress level in the job, absence of superintendent experience, and instability in length of job; (d) Possible candidates believed their willingness to apply could be positively influenced by honest and active recruitment and training and support from acting superintendents.

Conclusions. The majority of the superintendent-endorsed people were not planning to become a superintendent. As a whole, the endorsed population did not find the complexity and demands of the superintendency to be an attractive career move. If they were to seek a position, study participants wanted strong professional support and encouragement throughout the process.

Recommendations.

1. Similar research should be conducted in other states to further expand the understanding of the nation's leadership crisis--especially as it relates to the school superintendency.

2. There are indications that a similar leadership crisis is operating in the state of Iowa pertaining to building level leadership. A similar study could contribute to the dialogue addressing that crisis.

3. Participants in this study most often turned to current superintendents to receive information about the job. A study could reveal what superintendents are saying both formally and informally about their role.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Interest and attention to issues of leadership have been evident throughout our nation's history. Traditionally this attention has focused upon a "superman school of leadership" (Wills, 1994, p. 20) where individuals' success with the electorate, military, social movements, and industry is legendary. Leaders like Thomas Jefferson, George Patton, Martin Luther King, Jr., Eleanor Roosevelt, and Andrew Carnegie are names readily recognized by everyone as people who helped the nation address its problems. More recently, media and television have publicly applauded and derided corporate executives and public servants for their leadership expertise, while a proliferation of popular authors have posited their views of what people generally admire, trust, and say they want from their leaders. What has resulted from this cultural fascination with leadership is an ever-expanding body of inquiry portraying excellent contemporary business, government, and school leaders as people who are honest and inspire confidence, possess skills to clarify issues, draw attention to difficult problems, and work with their followers to make things right amid a world of change and instability (Block, 1993; Bolman & Deal, 1995; Fullan, 1993; Heifetz, 1994; Kouzes & Posner, 1995; Vaill, 1989; Wheatly, 1992). As we enter the 21st century we are faced with unprecedented changes in technology, political and economic systems, and society. While it may be reassuring to hold on to our conventional images of leaders who are

heroes, executing great feats, motivating diverse followers, and bringing communities and nations together, the forecast for the future is that much of what leaders must do, and how they do it, needs to change (Hickman, 1998). Paradoxically, as these societal shifts occur most people continue to see leadership as crucial to their future, yet they are not sure what these new demands mean in the context of what we historically know and understand about leadership. How we choose to meet this leadership challenge is paramount to who we are as a people and what we want to become.

Nowhere is this leadership challenge more important than in our nation's schools. Since the publication of A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence, 1983), the media, the popular press, television, and radio have all attested to our nation's schools being in dire need of reform. Accompanying much of this "crisis" dialogue have been discussions concerning the effects of good and poor leadership with considerable focus on the person at the top--the superintendent. Over the past 15 years studies of school superintendencies have focused in great part on what many believe about local district level school leaders: a strong superintendent will make things happen, while the firing of an ineffective superintendent "is thought to mark the end of bad times" (Johnson, 1996, p. xi).

What we have learned about this position since the mid-1980s characteristically reflects what Sykes and Elmore argued in 1988 about our nation's schools becoming unmanageable because we try to "fit" leaders into impossible roles and structures (p. 78). Admittedly, growing expectations and intensified demands are being placed on all

educators in today's schools--teachers as well as building leaders (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Hargreaves, 1996)--but it is the school superintendent who many claim sits in the most visible hot seat.

Numerous authors have argued being a superintendent today requires "fire in the belly" (Carter & Cunningham, 1997, p. 4), physical stamina, sound judgment, political acumen, and a willingness to subordinate a person's personal goals and positional power to the community, teacher unions, and school boards (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993; McAdams & Cressman, 1997; McCurdy, 1992; Sharp & Walter, 1997; Wimpelberg, 1997). Still others have described those who serve in this role as, "the target of criticism and at the center of controversy, forced to become the defender of policy, and the implementor of state and federal mandates, and the orchestrator of diverse interests seeking to influence the schools" (Norton, Webb, Dlugosh, & Sybouts, 1996, p. 21). From newspaper editorials to gossip in the town caf, stories are replete with characterizations of the pressure cooker life of today's school superintendent. Whether he or she serves in a small rural school (Heath & Vik, 1993), a middle-class suburban district (Kelly, 1997), or a large metropolitan urban city (Bennett, 1991; Kowalski, 1995) no one portrays today's school superintendency as an easy job.

Despite the intractable nature of today's superintendency, researchers who study this position, policy makers who set hiring criteria, higher education faculty and professional development organizations' staff who work with new and experienced superintendents believe this leadership role is as important as it has ever been. Many link the importance of district level leadership to the overall

importance of Pre K-12 schools, whereby the job these leaders do--now and in the future--greatly influences the common 'good' for everyone. It is argued that the success of organizations greatly depends on the skills and talents of its top leader and if the "business" of our nation's schools is to prepare young people to function successfully and to contribute to an improved social order (Crow & Slater, 1996; Glickman, 1998), then it follows that school superintendents are particularly crucial not only to the overall well-being of the local community he/she serves but in a very real sense to the nation as a whole.

The rationale for this research effort is built on this argument that school superintendents are crucial to the success of current school reform efforts (Griffin, 1994; Hodgkinson, 1991; Mitchell & Beach, 1993) and in the long run to the success of American education (Carter, Glass, & Hord, 1993). Despite this well documented argument, however, talk of a leadership crisis has flooded legislators' hearing rooms, current school leadership journals, and been cited in national school leadership organizations' (e.g., AASA, NASSP, NAESP) newsletters and in state reports. In general, these documents and testimonies reflect what Carter and Cunningham (1997) describe as a growing trend of superintendents leaving their positions with few applying to take their place. If this trend continues they predict it will "bring upheaval in the profession which will result in lost promise for American youth and ultimately the nation" (p. 8). This study was intended to contribute to the current dialogue regarding the nation's leadership dilemma and to specifically

consider why, despite the influence of today's school superintendent, there is a growing trend toward a lack of interest for doing this job.

Iowa Context

Specifically this study focused on how this current leadership trend is playing out in the State of Iowa, where in March of 1998, the Iowa Department of Education issued the following:

Iowa has a long history of educational excellence, and skilled administrators at all levels have been a major reason for that success. Now, a shortage of qualified school administrators is affecting Iowa—a shortage that could seriously hinder the state's ability to build on its tradition of excellence and create schools to meet the needs of its citizens in the 21st century.

The evidence of an administrator shortage is plentiful. The average number of applicants for a superintendent's position in Iowa has declined seriously and a similar decrease has occurred in the number of applicants for other administrative positions. While the number of applicants is declining, qualified Iowa educators are choosing not to take administrative positions. (School Administrator Shortage, Department of Education, 1998, paragraph 1)

Adding to the Department's call of concern was a survey that had been conducted in the previous year by the Institute for Educational Research at the University of Northern Iowa which found that because changes were made in the Iowa state retirement system, 50% of Iowa's 360 superintendents were expected to retire by the year 2004, with one-third expected to retire by 2003 (D. Else, Director of Institute for Educational Research, personal communication, April 16, 1997). Other demographic indications are that with each academic year there are more school superintendent openings than previously had been the case, while at the same time a number of Iowa school districts received "less than half to one-third the number of applicants they would have expected five to ten years ago" ("Turnover at the Top," 1997).

Finally, staff from various state wide education organizations have studied a variety of current licensure and demographic factors which they believe substantially affect, or influence, Iowa's "looming crisis in education administration" (School Administrators of Iowa, 1997, p. 4). As the Executive Director of the Iowa Association of School Boards put it, "We are most concerned about having highly qualified people to move into the superintendency and all administrative positions. We can't deliver on higher accountability unless we have strong and qualified professional leadership" ("Superintendent Drain in the Forecast," 1998).

Purpose/Importance of the Study

The purpose of this study was to contribute to a better understanding of a growing perception that something must be done about the leadership in our nation's schools. Although there is consensus that those who hold the position of the chief administrator or school superintendent have a profound influence on what happens in today's schools, it is also understood that various factors currently influence people's perceptions of this crucial leadership job and in turn affect whether or not they choose to serve in the role. The aim of this study was to find out from people who held the requisite credentials to be a superintendent, but who were not serving in that position, why fewer people were choosing to apply for a superintendent's job. It was assumed that by surveying and talking with a number of these people their perceptions might provide additional insight for state level policy makers, local school boards, university faculty, and professional

development organization staffs regarding key issues affecting the current school superintendent leadership crisis in Iowa

Problem Statement and Research Questions

The problem of this study was to find out how many people held a valid Pre K-12 superintendent endorsement in Iowa during the 1996-97 calendar year, but who were not currently serving as a superintendent in the state. In addition the study sought to determine whether or not any of these people were seeking a superintendent position, and if not what barriers they perceived and what would entice them to change their minds.

The following four research questions guided this study:

1. How many people held a valid Iowa Pre K-12 superintendent's endorsement during the 1996-97 calendar year, but were not serving in that position?
2. How many of these endorsed people were currently seeking a superintendent position?
3. What did these people see as significant barriers to seeking a superintendent position?
4. What would entice these people to seek a superintendent position?

Methodology

The research design, data collection, and data analysis for this study was based on grounded theory, a general qualitative methodology that evolves during the actual research and uses continuous interplay between analysis and data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, 1997).

Specifically this study evolved through three stages of data collection and analysis: (a) conducting conversational interviews with eight education leaders who were knowledgeable in the current issues of the school superintendency in Iowa, (b) surveying all individuals (315) who held a valid Pre K-12 superintendent endorsement, but who were not serving in that position during the 1996-97 calendar year, and (c) holding three focus forums throughout the state with selected survey respondents to further explore data collected from the survey.

Limitations

The limitations of this study were:

1. The intent of this study was to understand the nature of the perceived superintendent leadership shortage in the state of Iowa. The descriptive findings of this qualitative study cannot be generalized to other states, nor can the findings discussed be considered reflective of all the people who hold valid Pre K-12 superintendent endorsements.
2. While there are many explanations for why people seek particular job opportunities, as a way to narrow the scope of this research effort, data for this study was from the calendar year 1996-97 and reflected the perceptions of people who held an endorsement during that year only. The findings reported here did not necessarily reflect how similar populations might respond at other times.
3. The intent of the focus forums used for this study was to further explore and provide insight to the results obtained from the survey. Although comments from the forum participants provided useful examples and further explanations to the survey questions, participants'

examples and further explanations to the survey questions, participants' perceptions cannot be generalized to the larger survey population.

Organization of the Study

The second chapter of this study reviews the literature regarding the leadership, demographics, and challenges of today's school superintendency. The third chapter presents details of methodology. In the fourth chapter, the findings of the study are presented. The fifth and final chapter provides a summary discussion of the findings, and draws conclusions of the study. In addition, implications are offered and recommendations are suggested for future research.

Definition of Terms

AASA: American Association of School Administrators was founded in 1865 and is a professional organization that mostly serves superintendents across North America and in many other countries.

NASSP: National Association of Secondary School Principals was founded in 1916 and is a professional organization, which mostly serves secondary principals and assistant principals in the United States and 50 overseas countries.

NAESP: National Association of Elementary School Principals was founded in 1921 and is a professional organization that serves Pre K-8 principals across the United States and around the world.

AEA: Area Education Agency referred to one of the 15 intermediate school corporations under the jurisdiction of the Iowa Department of

Education that provides a broad range of services to school districts located in the agency's geographic area.

SAI: School Administrators of Iowa is a professional organization that has been serving Iowa's educational leaders since 1987. SAI has over 2,000 members and its mission is "to be the driving force for quality education in Iowa's communities through the aggressive promotion and active development of effective administrative leadership" (School Administrators of Iowa, Annual Report, 1997).

Superintendency: referred to the position of superintendent of schools and all the duties associated with the position.

Superintendent: referred to the professionally prepared individual who serves as the general executive or administrator at the local school district level (Knezevich, 1975, p. 339).

Superintendent endorsement: referred to those who hold an Iowa educator's licensure endorsement which authorizes the person to serve as a superintendent from the pre-kindergarten level through grade 12 in Iowa. People who hold this endorsement must have a master's degree plus at least 30 additional semester hours of planned graduate study in school administration and supervision.

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter explores the job of superintendent of schools through three avenues: (a) Leadership, including crisis, historical perspective, shortage of candidates, and training; (b) Demographics, including overview, gender and minority representation; and (c) Challenges, including politics, role expectations, and personal and family stresses.

Leadership

Why as a nation do we need leaders? Why can't individuals determine their own direction? The simple truth is that millions of people cannot get along without leaders. Leaders are responsible for the effectiveness of our organizations all the way from basketball teams, to giant corporations, to public schools. People still want and need leadership even though the "heroic leadership" myth has been shattered, and cynicism has taken its place (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. xvii). Today's organizations are looking for strong leaders to move them forward. They want leaders who are in tune with the ideas of community, norms, beliefs, values, vision and cooperation (Barlett & Ghoshal, 1995; Hesselbein, Goldsmith, & Beckhard, 1996; Patterson, 1993; Sergiovanni, 1992).

Leaders today, however, sometimes appear to be an endangered species, caught in a whirl of events and circumstances beyond rational control (Bennis, 1989, p. 14). Nowhere is this more prevalent than in

the top school leadership position--the superintendency. Contemporary attitudes toward the superintendency have been shaped by the events of the past, therefore to fully understand the position's importance, changing conditions, and increased challenges, one needs a working knowledge of its history (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Konnert & Augenstein, 1995; Sharp & Walter, 1997).

Historical Perspective

The superintendency is nearly 160 years old. It was created in recognition that the larger endeavor of public education had become too demanding for a board of education composed of volunteers who donated their services. A full-time leader was needed to carry out the policies initiated by the board. Buffalo, New York, is most often recognized as establishing the first superintendency, when the Buffalo common council appointed a superintendent on June 9, 1837. Soon after the Buffalo appointment, mayors and aldermen of Louisville, Kentucky, and Providence, Rhode Island, also appointed superintendents of public schools (Bateman, 1996).

By the Civil War, 27 large Eastern and Midwestern cities had established a superintendent as the chief administrative officer. As cities grew after the Civil War, the number of superintendencies grew parallel with the increases in school population. However, the day-to-day governance in thousands of small rural districts was left in the hands of farmer-populated school boards or area committees (Callahan, 1966). As responsibilities and districts continued to grow county committees were formed and eventually lead to the formation of the position of county superintendent. Today the county superintendent is

still a viable role in many educational systems. The county office serves as the intermediary between the local districts and the state department, and the county superintendent serves in the capacity of a local superintendent (Konnert & Augenstein, 1995).

Carter and Cunningham (1997), authors of *The American School Superintendent: Leading in an Age of Pressure*, wrote that since its inception the role of the American public school superintendency has gone through four major stages:

1. Acting in its earliest role the superintendency was a clerical position. The superintendent was expected to assist the school board with the day-to-day details of school activities.
2. As its second role the superintendency acted in the position as a master educator, providing direction on curricular and instructional matters.
3. The growth of education and the focus on efficiency in the first half of the 20th century saw the induction of the principles of scientific management into the schools. Schools were forged into industrial models. The superintendency as its third role acted in the position as the expert manager. In fact, some of the larger school districts actually appointed dual superintendents—one for business and one for education. The influence of scientific management is still evident in schools, though many current educators declare that its highly centralized, hierarchical bureaucracy, and organizational chain of command are primary obstacles to reform and restructuring.
4. The superintendency as its fourth and current role acts as the chief executive officer for the board. That role requires the

superintendent to serve as a professional advisor to the board, lead reforms for the district, manage the district's resources, be the communicator to the public, and carry the district's public relation's banner.

The social conflicts of the 1960s and 1970s significantly impacted public school districts and their superintendents. School boards experienced a major change in composition. The majority of board's members up until that time had been businessmen and professionals interested in public education for the general welfare. Increasingly board members were becoming blue-collar workers, homemakers, and others elected as single-issue candidates intent on changing the system. The call in American education to its superintendents' became one for leadership, political savvy, reform, community responsiveness, and improved education (Boyd, 1976; Dykes, 1965; Getzels, Liphan, & Campbell, 1968).

Social unrest and conflict during this period definitely changed the superintendency. However, few superintendents have written about their unique experiences during this tumultuous time in American history. Larry Cuban (1988) in his book, *The Managerial Imperative and the Practice of Leadership in Schools*, talks openly about how the social tensions in the community spilled into the schools. When parents or community members became disenchanted with their school district, the first person to hear about it was usually the superintendent. Board members might get calls, but it was the superintendent who coped with the daily criticism. That criticism was compounded by complaints from unhappy employees and unions often at odds with the school board and

other community interest groups. Hence, superintendents were frequently caught between hotly and bitterly competing groups (Tucker & Zeigler, 1980; Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

The 1980s and 1990s have been characterized as an era of continual attempts to reform America's schools, whereby schools have become the focal point for the resolution of broad economic, ideological, and societal issues, with most of the mandates for change emanating from top-down legislation (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). Even at the local level some mandates have been handed down by the board of education. The challenge for the superintendent in the 1990s has been to find ways to manage all of the various national, state, and local pressures for improving school performance, while working with the local constituents and staff to develop effective schools based on student achievement (Marinelli, 1996).

Shortage of Candidates

As early as 1988 the rapid turnover of superintendents was increasingly identified as a significant deterrent to sustained efforts by school districts to improve the quality of their schools and instruction for their students (Bennett, 1991; Kerr, 1988; Murphy, 1991; Olson, 1995). Examples abounded during the early 1990s, for instance, in one 18-month period 27 of the 47 school districts that belonged to the Council of Great City Schools needed to replace a superintendent (Daley, 1990). The turnover, during that time, was by no means confined to the large cities. A study of rural Oklahoma school districts showed 41 districts that had three or more superintendents in a five-year period (Chance & Capps, 1990).

Some city school boards, in the mid-1990s, hoping to stem the tide of turnovers, decided to seek their superintendents from the business world and made attempts to hire CEOs to run their schools. Because of the low salaries, compared with those given in the corporate world, boards had few successes in finding CEOs interested in tackling the job. A Chicago school board member put it in these words, "Number one, we don't pay them enough; number two, they get treated like garbage; ...and number three, they get run out of town" (Jones, 1994, p. 24).

Education publications today continue to chronicle a growing national concern over the lack of candidates for administrative positions. Regions all over the United States from California to New England, from the Midwest to the South, report similar declines in the number of applicants for the superintendency. In Massachusetts, for example, nine of their superintendents in 1995, ranging in age from 48 to 60, left the job for other careers. That same year, in Colorado, the School Board Association reported about 25% of the state's 176 superintendents left their jobs (Speer, 1995).

The problem with superintendents leaving is not just that they are leaving, it is that there are no applicants to take their place. The director for the Michigan School Boards Association in 1995 stated that in the six years she had held her position the average number of superintendent applicants per job opening had dropped in half from 80 to 40 (Speer, 1995). In 1998, a Delaware school district reopened its superintendency search due to a lack of qualified candidates in its first search, and a district in rural Main conducted two superintendent searches before giving up and making the decision to promote a principal

from within their ranks and allowing her to be trained for the position (McAdams, 1998). In Iowa in 1998, the members of the Des Moines School Board were told by consultants that their search for a new superintendent could take up to a year, and to not be surprised if their pool of candidates from which to choose, was small (Bolton, 1998).

Educators concerned that not enough people were being prepared to be administrators have launched strong recruitment efforts under the guise that more people prepared will translate into more applicants for administrative positions. What they hoped for has not been the case; studies and reports from state and national organizations are indicating that although more people are obtaining administrative certificates, fewer and fewer are seeking positions (McAdams, 1998; Villanueva, 1997).

Training

Some advocate that the very nature of the preparation and training of aspiring superintendents be changed, and perhaps that would encourage more people to consider the position (Mathews, 1999; Murphy, 1993; Varhola, 1998).

Formally a person aspiring to the superintendency is expected to secure state certification or endorsement to assume the position. While the specific requirements vary from state to state, there are three general requirements: (a) satisfied completion of specified graduate work and/ or degrees, (b) satisfactory completion of one or more internships, and (c) evidence of satisfactory performance in another administrative position within a school system (Konnert & Augenstein, 1995, p. 229).

The move toward professionalism began in the 1950s. Aspiring superintendents were often trained by large-city superintendents turned professors who taught students in the skills and practices that they felt had worked successfully for them (Getzels et al., 1968; Griffiths, 1966). In the 1960s and 1970s professors of educational administration took training into the realm of sociology and psychology using theoretical models of management and moving away from real life examples of leadership, because most of them had never been school administrators. The 1980s and 1990s ushered in the era of licensing, certifying, endorsing, etc., handled by professional schools, such as business, law, education, social work, medicine, pharmacy, and journalism. The professionalization of the professions became a field of scholarship unto itself (Chapman, 1997, p. v).

Today's preparation and training of superintendents many believe can best be improved by focusing on efforts to involve those already in the position (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Kaufhold, 1993; Murphy, 1993). Overwhelmingly, when new superintendents were asked to reflect on what would have helped them the most beyond their formal training, they responded more hands-on or experience-based opportunities (Chapman, 1997). They also liked classes that were taught by practitioners, and felt there should be some way in which experienced superintendents were actively engaged with people preparing for the superintendency. Others lamented that no where in their schooling had they learned the "street smarts" of organizational and political life (Chapman, 1997, p. 237). Improving formal training is only the "tip of the iceberg" when it comes to preparing school leaders for the complex superintendency of the

future (Kaufhold, 1993, p. 42). The possibilities of radical program designs should be nurtured and explored within the academic and professional responsibilities inherent in the position (Murphy, 1993).

Demographics

In order to fully comprehend the present-day school leadership crisis one needs to understand who typically serves in the role. Today's people who hold the top school leadership position have been described as "average Joes" or characterized as "mainstream" people (Glass, 1992). The average age of today's superintendent is approximately 49. They come from traditionally blue-collar families, are political moderates, have a college education, are primarily Protestant, mostly white Caucasian males, with the majority serving in districts of less than 3,000 students. This profile of the American school superintendent has remained fairly constant over the last 70 years. Demographic predictions indicate, however, that as work force composition changes to include women and other minorities the characterization of the school superintendent will follow those shifting contours (Konnert & Augenstein, 1995; McAdams, 1998).

If the future of the school superintendency does shift as predicted, then it follows that during the 21st century the position of the school superintendent will become more important than ever before. Many believe the success and well-being of American education may stand or fall, as much on the survival of the position of superintendent of schools, as it does on the superintendent's ability to manage and lead our schools (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Chapman, 1997; Houston, 1998).

Gender

If America has truly passed through the reform era of the 1990s perhaps it is ready to fully embrace women into the ranks of the superintendency. Women make up a substantially untapped pool available to fill the nation's and Iowa's growing leadership void (Grogan, 1996). An AASA National Study conducted in 1992 (Glass) put the overall percentage of women superintendents in the United States at 6.6%. That figure showed a slight increase from previous decades.

Iowa, for many years, has ranked at the bottom of the national average in the number of female superintendents (Siebert, 1996). In 1985 women comprised just 1.6% of the superintendent population, and in 1997, the year of this study, the percentage of women superintendents was reported at only 4.4% (Iowa Department of Education, 1997).

Studies on women in school leadership have multiplied over the years, i.e., Regan and Brooks (1995), Hargreaves (1996), Grogan and Smith (1998), Brunner (1997), Tallerico and Burstyn (1996), and Blount (1998). Most built on the hallmark work of Carol Shakeshaft (1989). Shakeshaft's book, *Women in Educational Leadership*, was lauded as the first to fill in the gaps in traditional literature about women in administration.

Over the last two decades several theories have been put forth to try and explain the underrepresentation of women. One claims the women themselves, due to some personal traits, characteristics, or qualities are the problem. They are just not strong enough or they lack self confidence, etc. (Schmuck, 1987; Shakeshaft, 1989). Another points to the external barriers that work against women, particularly in hiring

and promotion practices (Bell & Chase, 1993). A third highlights the cultural and social norms that channel men and women into different types of work (Hansot & Tyack, 1981; Shakeshaft, 1989).

Tallerico & Burstyn (1996) simply said their research suggested a pattern in which stereotypical images of what a socially acceptable leader looks like and does worked against many women, creating obstacles to trust, acceptance, and credibility and contributing to their feelings of stress and disenchantment with the job. Because of their gender women are outside the mainstream due to a lack of a critical mass of women in the superintendency nationwide, and they are also outsiders in their male dominated profession (Bell & Chase, 1993; Cooper, 1995; Grogan, 1996).

The disenchantment that women feel in the position of superintendent assumes they have attained the position. Many feel there are specific groups or individuals that influence school boards' decisions on who they will hire as their superintendents: college professors, search consultants, acting superintendents (Carter et al., 1993; Chase & Bell, 1994; Oritz & Marshall, 1988). These "gatekeepers," as Tallerico and Burstyn (1996) call them, hold crucial powers when it comes to sponsorship of women, and preventing women from being channeled into high-risk positions that jeopardize their success. School boards, some say, create their own gate-keeping by being willing only in disparate, unmanageable systems to take a chance on hiring a woman (Blount, 1998; Carter et al., 1993).

The voices of women in administration are beginning to be recorded (Brunner, 1997; Grogan, 1996; Regan & Brooks, 1995). Regan and Brooks

shared the importance of the new language women are bringing to administration. Traditional administrative language is the language of scientific management--span of control, hierarchy, authority and division of labor. The new language is relational--caring, vision, collaboration, courage, and intuition. Brunner gathered advice from successful women superintendents that he thought would be helpful to aspiring women superintendents or those wishing for greater success while in the position. Grogan chronicled the professional aspirations of 27 highly qualified women in top-level administrative positions.

An Iowa author, Jackie M. Blount (1998), contributed a very comprehensive book, ala Shakeshaft, on women and the superintendency entitled, *Destined to Rule the Schools*. Blount tells the story of women and school leadership in America from the common school era to the present, and explores how power in school employment has been structured unequally by gender. In a broad sense, it offers an historical account of how teaching became women's work and the school superintendency men's. It may provide the only published comprehensive statistical study describing the number of women superintendents throughout the 20th century.

Blount compared the number of women in the superintendency from 1910 to 1990 and found that, overall, the representation of women in the 1930s had not been equaled by 1990 and only a slight increase had been manifested by five years later. Certainly this wasn't the kind of proportional increase expected by women then or is it acceptable to candidates today.

Minority

Nationally the same AASA study used to report the percentage of women superintendents placed minority superintendent figures at 3.9% (Glass, 1992). Iowa reported no minority superintendents in 1985 and showed only a slight gain 17 years later, the year of this study, with a 1.2% representation of minority superintendents (Iowa Department of Education, 1997).

In the United States today, most minority students attend schools in large urban districts. Minority superintendents are increasingly leading these urban districts. The minority representation among first-year superintendents in the 1992 AASA study (Glass) was 8.6% compared to the already mentioned 3.9% of superintendents overall. That same study showed that almost all minority superintendents were black or Hispanic. By the year 2020, approximately 35 to 40% of the school population will be composed of ethnic minorities, largely clustered in urban centers, where a Black or Hispanic superintendent might be, in charge of a district containing 200,000 of these students. Black and Hispanic superintendents do not constitute a large portion of the total candidate pool, but their influence on American schooling is becoming increasingly powerful as they become the leaders of large urban districts (Glass, 1992; Larson, 1997; Ovando & Troxell, 1997).

Although Carol Shakeshaft's 1998 article on affirmative action, *Wild Patience and Bad Fit: Assessing the Impact of Affirmative Action on Women in School Administration*, is predominately about women, she writes inclusive of all minorities. She laments that in the United States we lack a reliable, uniform, nation-wide, on-going database that lets us

know just how many women or minorities are school administrators and at what levels. While the states collect data, these data are often not comparable because of methods and definition, and therefore, whereas we might understand what is happening in one state, it is very difficult to compare those statistics to staff in another state. In addition to those limitations national, state, and organization data rarely provide breakdowns for sex and race together. Although, she states, there are no comparable nationwide statistics that report both administrative representation by race and sex, she refers to a recent study conducted by the District Superintendents Committee on Women and Minority Administrators in New York (1997) which documents an increase in women and members of minority groups in all administrative positions. Shakeshaft's belief is, whether it comes from a structural or political analysis, or the current political proclamation that there is no more inequity, we have moved away from trying to understand the subtleties of gender and race discrimination in the work world. She ends by saying, "I believe that we are at a perilous time in the evolution of a just and affirmative society. I believe we need to stand up and speak for affirmative action and the values we hold dear" (p.12).

Schools today operate in a constantly changing, culturally diverse community. School leaders, particularly superintendents, confront value differences that arise from this cultural diversity on a daily basis. Racial, ethnic, and religious groups intermingle, and educational stakeholders regularly disagree about what is desirable in policies, procedures, and outcomes. However, school communities and leaders, perhaps unconsciously, still attempt to promote common homogeneous

cultures: White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, rural (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1998; Ovando & Troxell, 1997; Walker & Quong, 1998).

Challenges

Although superintendents hold a prominent position and are considered important educational leaders, what we really know about them and the characteristics of their jobs, despite a recent flurry of studies by Johnson (1996), Chapman (1997), Carter and Cunningham (1997), and Sharp and Walter (1997), remains scant. Certain themes do emerge however, including: politics, role expectations, personal and family stresses.

Politics

Larry Cuban (1985), writing for *Phi Delta Kappan*, coined the phrase "Conflict is the DNA of the superintendency." It is a given, conflict is woven through every fiber of the job, in dealing with incompatible goals, resource scarcities, and diverging interests that characterize modern public education. Political differences among various groups both inside and outside education are placing increasing pressure on the way superintendents operate. Conflict comes in the guise of many different demands from many different special interest groups. Bargaining, negotiation, collegiality, coercion, and compromise become part of a superintendent's repertoire of political savvy actions and activities. By exercising these actions, he/she can forge temporary alliances that provide enough stability to carry on the day to day business of schooling (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993; Haynes, 1999; Mitchell & Beach, 1993; Wilson, 1995).

Conflict from within most often surfaces between the school board and the superintendent. In fact, superintendents cite conflicts between themselves and boards as the second most common reason for leaving a school district with the first being the desire for a larger, or better paying district (Grady & Bryant, 1991; McAdams & Cressman, 1997). Most board members come to public service with their own specific agendas they would like to see enacted, and with the belief they should perform as activists assertively managing school business. Superintendents, on the other hand, consider themselves well informed regarding best educational practice, and they expect the school board to accept their professional judgment on important matters, thus setting the stage for conflict (Griffith, 1990). Superintendents have also been charged, by the new focus on school reform, that all those who have an interest in the education process must help shape the needed changes. Today, however, the public attitude toward most administrators and public service employees is one of complete mistrust. Trying to build collegiality and consensus on an educational issue can actually end up further dividing a community, because proponents use the schools as a social and ideological battleground. Religious, economic, and cultural agendas push aside the major one--academics (Harrington-Lueker, 1996; Howlett, 1993; Yee & Cuban, 1996).

Beyond school boards and communities, superintendents have often found their hands tied by the mandates and regulations that are handed down from state and federal legislatures. Superintendents end up feeling just as powerless in dealing with all the bureaucratic red tape as the average American, let alone all the increased paperwork that seldom does

anything to improve educational performance. State and federal initiatives that created a back seat role for superintendents dominated the 1980's era of school reform. Then the emergence of 'choice' movements including privatization, vouchers, and charter schools as well as advocacy for more control at the local level by principles, teachers, and students themselves brought additional challenges to superintendents' authority and policy making leadership (Amprey, 1997; Dahm, 1996; Harrington-Lueker, 1997; Murphy, 1996; Nathan, 1998).

Role Expectations

Societal, economic, demographic, political, technological, and many other factors are dramatically changing the world in which we all live and the schools that educate our children. Superintendents are asked to be shepherds of change, to set the pace, and to lead by example. Amongst all the competing agendas, the superintendent brings everyone's attention to bear on important educational goals (Bredeson, 1996; Griffin, 1994; Mitchell & Beach, 1993). "The new culture of schools should encourage and expect that the education leaders will orchestrate a program that includes measurable goals as well as regular praise and celebration of progress toward these goals" (Schmoker, 1996, p. 105). School districts vary sharply as contexts for leadership--some growth inclined and some stagnant--so superintendents will have to take risks, and further, encourage others to do the same. In short, superintendents must provide conditions that enable the leadership to emerge, producing extraordinary results (Beni, 1996).

Superintendents cannot hope to lead districts without understanding and working with the interdependence public education has

developed with city, state, and national interests and directives. Districts no longer operate in the self-sufficient, isolated mode of earlier years. Studies in the past, Bidwell (1965) and Weick (1976), underemphasized the power and politics that occur within and around schools, and it is only in recent years that the school district has been described as a political arena (Wong, 1992). Superintendents perform best if they can view this interdependence as an opportunity along with obligation. "Superintendents must now pay attention to the fiscal worries of mayors and the political interests of governors; however they can also now build partnerships with social service agencies to support children and families" (Johnson, 1996, p. 274).

The superintendents' personal capacity to lead rests in part on their own moral purpose, their commitment to education, and their courage to stand up for what they believe. When constituents believe their superintendent took the job to career hop, or build a political, power-based empire, they doubt that good leadership can emanate from the central office. But when they believe their superintendent is truly dedicated to making schools work, they will more likely invest in school improvement (Hutchinson, 1997; Johnson, 1996; Sharp & Walter, 1997).

Personal and Family Stresses

In reality, the superintendent is on duty every hour of every day, as long as s/he is employed in the district. Superintendents are viewed as representing the school district and are held to a higher standard than others in the community. In many cities the superintendent must fulfill the societal expectations of being a role model par excellence for others to emulate, as well as a major player in upholding public

morals and community values. When an individual chooses to become a superintendent of schools, they must recognize that the decision is not only a professional one, but a lifestyle one as well (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Konnert & Augenstein, 1995; Sharp, 1998).

Executive Educator magazine commissioned an "Exclusive National Survey of School Executives," conducted by a research team from Xavier University (Booth et al., 1994). The 900 school executives who participated suggested that "school reform" was added to their job descriptions in the 1980s, and significantly increased the hours demanded to complete their jobs. Slightly more than 80% of the respondents reported they worked more than 50 hours per week, and almost one-third reported that they worked 60 hours per week or more. Regarding those long workdays, and attendance at meetings, 83% of the superintendents reported that their spouses complained about the hours they work. The superintendency directly, profoundly, impacts the partner's life--for better or worse (Sharp & Walter, 1997, p. 160). Add to that the expectation that superintendents take part in service organizations, professional career activities, and church responsibilities. It's understandable that almost half of those responding to the survey reported that the job placed too heavy a demand on them for time.

Since a superintendent normally begins their career in a small, relatively rural district and then progresses up the career ladder to larger districts, families experience the trauma and disruption of pulling up roots and moving to new areas (Chapman, 1997; Konnert & Augenstein, 1995). Rightly or wrongly, many boards feel a superintendent

can't really be a part of the community unless s/he resides there. That may mean three or four moves for the superintendent and their families during a normal career span. Another stressor for superintendent's families is the unjustified personal attacks. This can come as criticism from people who do not have a through perspective or understanding of an issue. Hearing criticism of a spouse or parent, when they know it is unwarranted can be devastating (Sharp, 1997). Finally, the attack on the superintendent's life and health can be quite heavy. If they are the only superintendent, as are most in small districts, they feel a deep sense of isolation (Besculides, 1999; Weber, 1999).

Daresh and Playko (1992) noted the concern among educators over the personal toll this position takes:

People appear to have lost interest in the superintendency because, in their minds, it is a job that requires too high a personal investment on the part of the individual. There are too many night meetings, confrontations with community pressure groups and teacher associations, lunches with civic groups, and negative disruptions with school boards. The typical view of the superintendency is that it is a job filled with stress, anxiety, loss of personal time, and conflict. (p. 9)

Echoing the same sentiments as those mentioned by Daresh and Playko, in 1998 when the Nebraska Council for School Administrators conducted a survey of spouses of school administrators statewide, the spouse's comments were revealing, emotional, and troubling. Most were supportive of their spouses in school administration, but they were also very critical of the increasing difficulties and unrealistic expectations faced by their partners (Bruckner, 1998).

Summary

As a society we look to leaders to guide the effectiveness of our organizations, and as we enter the 21st century the call for effective organizations is more prevalent than ever. More than anytime in our history, good organizational leaders seemingly are a scare commodity and no more so than the superintendent--the leader of schools. Superintendents have been leaving the profession in record numbers, and there are not sufficient applicants to replace them. Because the superintendent is considered by most scholars and the general public as a critical factor in success for local districts, many regard the lack of quality applicants for the jobs as a looming leadership crisis at the turn of the century.

The superintendency has undergone drastic changes throughout its 160 years of existence, winding through a picture of the superintendent as a clerk assisting a local governance committee to today's chief school executive exercising leadership. Throughout its history the American superintendency has remained the domain of white males, yet as the new century unfolds this white male portrait gallery will likely include a number of ethnic minorities and females.

All indications are, however, that no matter who fills the position it will continue its dubious reputation as an impossible job, a pressure cooker filled with unreal performance demands, requiring enormous amounts of time and energy.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

The research design, data collection, and data analysis for this study was based on grounded theory, a general qualitative methodology that evolves during the actual research and uses continuous interplay between analysis and data collection (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, 1997). Specifically, this study evolved through three stages of data collection and analysis: (a) conducting conversational interviews with eight education leaders who were knowledgeable in the current issues of the school superintendency in Iowa, (b) surveying all 315 individuals who held a valid Pre K-12 superintendent endorsement but who were not serving in that position during the 1996-97 calendar year, and (c) holding three focus group forums throughout the state with selected survey respondents to further explore data collected from the survey.

Conversational Interviews

The rationale for holding conversational interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) was to have a guided dialogue with people who, for varying reasons, had been actively engaged in activities surrounding the perceived leadership shortage in Iowa. These people were identified using what Glesne and Peshkin (1992, p. 27) refer to as "networking techniques" where the researcher asked professionals who were familiar with the study to identify people who were knowledgeable (Hertz & Imber, 1995; Rubin & Rubin, 1995) of the reality, as well as the myths

surrounding the leadership crisis in Iowa. Several of these individuals might be characterized as "informed--sympathetic allies" (Mitchell, 1991, p. 103) who were especially concerned with the topic of the research and who were well versed in the context of the state (Mishler, 1986). It was assumed that comments from these people would add to the researcher's general understanding of the literature and demographics regarding the superintendent leadership crisis as well as provide critical insight to the design of the study and the information required for the survey.

Selection of Interviewees

Eight people were interviewed for this portion of the study including two acting superintendents (one large district, one small district), two directors of organizations that conduct superintendent searches, a director of a state-level professional administrator's organization, a director of an Institute for Educational Leadership located at a state university, a director of an area education agency, and an educational consultant for a state corporation designed to help schools implement school improvement projects. Two of the participants had recently completed research studies regarding superintendent hiring practices. Six of the interviewees were male and two were female. One interviewee was Asian American the rest were Caucasian Americans.

Gaining Access

Since several of the interviewees were acquaintances of the researcher and most were familiar with other research on the study topic, their interest may have contributed to the fact that no one

declined an interview (Seidman, 1991, p. 33). In fact, everyone appeared to be genuinely excited about sharing their perceptions and all readily agreed to participate in the study. Four of the conversational interviews took place at the interviewee's place of work, two were telephone interviews, and two conversations took place at restaurants during the noon hour. All eight interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes and thank you notes were sent as a follow-up to each interview.

Data Collection/Analysis

The key to getting good information from interviewing is to ask good questions (Merriam, 1998) and, as Huberman and Miles (1994) advise, it is a good idea to start with some general questions. They allow you to get clear about what is of most interest. Thus, three open-ended questions guided each of these conversational interviews:

1. What is your impression of the school superintendent leadership crisis in Iowa?
2. What do you believe are factors that keep people from seeking a superintendency?
3. Do you have any suggestions concerning what to do about the current perception that there aren't enough people interested in the school superintendency?

Although these three questions set the framework of the interviews, in general the interviews were non-directive and followed a more conversational tone than a focused interview (Kvale, 1996). The interviews were not recorded and transcribed, however. The researcher took comprehensive hand-written notes during the interviews and kept a reflective field log (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984) categorized around the

following descriptors: Shortage, Barriers, Suggestions, and Additional Comments/Concerns. By using three different color highlighting pens, similar comments across all interviews were given the same color marking --yellow for comments referring to a shortage, green for comments on barriers, pink for suggestions, and blue for additional comments and concerns. Then comments were merged into a narrative that expanded on the three main questions as they pertained to the interviewee's descriptions of their personal experiences, what they said other colleagues were saying or what several had found from their own investigations and research regarding the job of school superintendent.

Survey

A survey was selected as the primary data source of this study because it was a good method of collecting information directly from people about their ideas, feelings, beliefs, plans, and educational backgrounds. It provided a self-administered questionnaire that respondents could fill out and return on their own time frame, and it provided numerical data that served as the framework for the subsequent focus group forums (Fink & Kosecoff, 1998).

Selection of Respondents

A staff profile list of people endorsed as administrators, including principals, in the 1996-97 calendar year was requested and received from the Iowa Department of Education. The names were in alphabetical order, but were listed according to the Area Education Agency in which the person was employed as an administrator--therefore there were 15 alphabetical lists. The mailing labels that accompanied

the master list were also printed in the same manner--per AEA. A separate computer printout was received that carried the names of the 315 individuals endorsed to be a superintendent but not employed as a superintendent in that same year. Labels, however, did not accompany that list; they would have had to be pulled from the master set of labels. Over a two-day period the researcher hand sorted the over 2,000 labels by cross-referencing the names on the separate list (those endorsed but not serving as superintendents) to the master list (all endorsed administrators), thereby preparing a mailing to the 315 individuals who became the established sample (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996) for the survey.

Survey Development

The survey form included three drafts. The first draft incorporated ideas taken from a review of surveys used in other educational research projects. The second draft added key points garnered from the conversational interviews. Five educators, two men and three women holding varying positions including superintendents, principals, and teachers, test-piloted the survey to help refine a form that was usable and would provide the information needed (Babbie, 1990). As each educator read through the survey their questions to the researcher targeted for change unclear wording or directions, and their suggestions helped expand from 20 to 22 the initial list of barriers to employment, that had been recorded from the conversational interviews. It took each educator approximately 30 minutes, including questions and clarifications asked of the researcher, to complete the survey, so it

was assumed that the average respondent could complete the questionnaire in approximately 20 minutes. After being revised per suggestions from the pilot-test the survey was printed in its third and final form.

The two-page questionnaire was developed to be a quick checklist, short-answer style form, utilizing three types of questions: forced choice, check all that apply, and open-ended. The researcher believed that the cross-sectional survey design would give a snapshot (Fink & Kosecoff, 1998) of the superintendent endorsed population in Iowa. The survey form was printed front to back and contained 36 questions (Appendix A).

Gaining Access

A cover letter sharing the need for the survey and how the data would be used to help Iowa's educational leaders in their dialogue about the superintendent shortage, was written by the researcher and the Executive Director of the School Administrators of Iowa (Appendix B). The letter informed the person how they had been selected to receive the survey, and why their participation was critical to the understanding of the leadership crisis in the state. Respondents were assured that their individual responses would be held in confidence. They were told, however, that the results would be used in reports for those interested in revising endorsement requirements, designing preparation programs in Iowa and other aspects of the role of a school superintendent. Cover letters, surveys, and enclosures were hand folded in preparation for mailing. A self-addressed, stamped envelope was included to encourage the respondent to return the self-administered survey. A return date was indicated at the bottom of each survey, along with a special thank you.

Data Collection/Analysis

Two hundred and twenty-two of the 315 surveys mailed were completed for a return rate of 70.4%. Data analysis was conducted in descriptive statistics for surveys described by Fink and Kosecoff (1998, p. 60) including: counts (numbers or frequencies); proportions (percentages); measures of central tendency (the mean, median, and mode); and the measure of variation (range). The first six questions (three unnumbered and A, B, C) of the survey, used to establish the job status of the respondents, were tabulated for frequency and percentage of responses. Similar items (23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31) dealing with demographic data, were also tabulated for frequency and percentage of responses, but were not rank ordered.

Forced choice items 1 through 22, perceived barriers to a superintendent's position, were scored by value {1 (low) – 5 (high)}, frequency, and percentage of responses. They were then rank ordered by mean score establishing a range from 3.94 to 1.30. This data was also disaggregated to determine if being sorted per male and female respondent would cause the ranking to significantly change. Items (29, 30, 33, 34) assessing the respondents personal experiences and beliefs, which were check-all-that-apply items were tabulated by count and percentage of responses. Written responses to three items (32, 35, 36) requesting that the respondent's record their suggestions or beliefs about the superintendency were word-processed in the respondent's exact words. Although there was much duplication of thoughts, 640 comments were recorded.

To determine specifically who, from the superintendent-endorsed pool in terms of position they now held, would be seeking a superintendent's position in the near future item 23 (current position) was cross tabulated with item C (will you be seeking a position). To determine if males and females used different sources to obtain information about superintendent job openings, item 30 (gathered perception from) was cross tabulated with item 24 (gender).

Tabulation of the survey was done through the services of Area Education Agency XI. Full tabulation results are presented in graph and table format in Chapter 4. A typist was hired to word process the 640 short-answer written responses. Those responses were categorized for like information and recorded in either bullet or narrative form in Chapter 4.

Focus Group Forums

Focus group forums were selected as an additional primary source of data gathering because of their ability to provide carefully planned discussions by the survey respondents in a permissive, non-threatening environment (Krueger, 1988). Three focus group forums were held, in the spring of 1998, in an effort to expand on the information and identify trends and patterns in perceptions recorded from the survey. Survey data as a rule do not identify important qualifiers that may accompany answers to structured questions, nor do they offer the opportunity for feedback from and response to the comments of others (Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990), thus the need for holding focus forums. The first forum was held in central Iowa, the second was in the eastern part of

the state, with the third being conducted in the western half of the state.

Selection of Participants

Participants for the focus forums were selected to establish, as much as possible, a representation of minorities, age, and educational background. They formed "homogenous groups" (Krueger, 1988, p. 92) because of their knowledge base, involvement in educational organizations, geographical area, and expressed interest in the topic. All held a current superintendent's endorsement, and at the time of the invitation were not acting as a superintendent. The executive director of the state administrators' professional organization, being acquainted through professional activities, with a majority of the possible participants, helped in their identification and selection. Fifteen possible participants were identified for each planned focus forum.

Gaining Access

Identified participants were first contacted by a letter of invitation co-written by the researcher and the Executive Director of SAI. Participants were thanked for their excellent response to the survey and asked to take part in an in-depth discussion on several areas tabulated from the survey that warranted a greater depth of exploration. The full text of the letter is given in Appendix C.

Participants received dinner and a \$50.00 stipend for their participation in the forum. An acceptance return form and self-addressed, stamped envelope were included in each invitation. They were also informed that the focus forums would be recorded to fully

capture the information, however, their comments would not be attributed to a specific name thus preserving confidentiality of their comments. Nine participants accepted for the first forum, 8 accepted for the second forum and 10 accepted for the third and final forum. Follow-up reminder calls were made prior to each focus group. Forums lasted approximately one-and-one-half to two hours. They were held at the main office of the School Administrators of Iowa and two Area Education offices.

Data Collection

The researcher believed that a skilled moderator was necessary to the success of the forums. Focus groups are not a collection of simultaneous individual interviews, but rather a group discussion where the conversation flows due to the nurturing of the moderator. The moderator must have adequate background knowledge on the topic of discussion to place comments in perspective and follow up on critical areas of concern (Morgan, 1988). The executive director of the School Administrators of Iowa agreed to act as the moderator with the researcher attending to recording duties. A large microphone capable of picking up voices from around 15 feet was used to record each forum. Participants were identified by name tags for ease of discussion, but to maintain their anonymity were not identified to specific statements for the audio recording.

To enhance discussion all participants were asked to spend the first 10 minutes writing on a thought organizer their reflections to the questions that were to be discussed during the forum. All of the questions used for the forums were derived from the survey, survey

results, or spontaneously posed by the moderator. The moderator chose the exact wording of the first question used to start discussion in each focus forum, but all the forums began with a discussion of the top-ranked barriers as determined from the survey. Participants were asked to expand on what they believed were the issues or concerns causing these barriers to have received the highest rankings. Six additional questions, taken directly from the survey, were listed on the participant's thought organizer. Two questions were added that had not been included on the survey. The first asked, What are some of the positives about the job that we could share with perspective candidates? The second was a broad question simply requesting the participants to share any further comments or observation they would like to make. A major advantage of focus groups is the dynamics of the group interaction process which can lead to ideas that may not be expressed in an individual interview or questionnaire due to lack of context (Bloch, 1992).

The atmospheres of all forums were specifically designed to be friendly and informal based on the expectation that the participants would do most of the talking. Participants were encouraged to speak freely, offer their personal views, and share the voices and opinions of their colleagues (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 140). Most appeared to be very comfortable and, at times, even animated in sharing their beliefs and perceptions. As was expected due to the variation of participants and differing opinions (Krueger, 1988) discussions in each forum took different routes in addressing the same questions and different points of emphasis emerged in each forum. In the first forum the notion of the

impact on family was the most discussed item. In the second forum minority issues claimed a major portion of the time, and in the third forum the interest centered upon the emergence of charter schools.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the data followed procedures suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967), Lincoln and Guba (1985), and Strauss and Corbin (1994) for coding and development of themes utilizing a process of constant comparison and continual searching for on-going patterns and trends among the data. Analysis was conducted as an activity simultaneously with data collection, data interpretation, and narrative writing (Creswell, 1994).

A double-spaced, word-by-word transcript was typed for each focus forum. One was 51 pages, the second was 36 pages, and the third was 35 pages. The lines were numbered for ease in analysis. After carefully reading and re-reading the transcripts the researcher began coding by using a specific color (pink – first forum, green – second forum, blue – third forum) for each focus forum transcript. The code words identified key concepts that had been generated by a detailed sentence and paragraph analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 73), and the colors denoted the forum in which the ideas were located.

Key concepts were then transferred to separate cards with the appropriate color to identify them to the forum, which had generated the concept. For ease in locating specific information, cards carried the line number(s) of the sentences or paragraphs in which the information could be found. Combining like information and comments across the three forums built a base upon which a narrative of the findings were

produced. Those narratives, centered on the themes and categories that emerged, are reported in Chapter 4.

Summary

This chapter presented the methods and procedures used to conduct the study. The three means of data collection included: conversational interviews, survey, and focus group forums, and were carried out through an interactive process of confirming and expanding insight into the research questions. Key themes or categories which emerged from the conversational interviews were coupled with the information garnered from the review of literature, to design items placed on the survey instrument. Data tabulated and compiled from the survey was then used as a framework for the focus forum questions. Major themes that emerged across all three data sources are presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

The findings presented in this chapter are divided into three sections, each pertaining to a stage of the data gathering process. The first section, conversational interviews, summarizes perceptions shared by eight interviewees, selected because of their knowledge of the topic. The second section details the design and implementation of the 1997 research survey by individuals holding a superintendent's endorsement but not serving, during that year, as a school superintendent. The third section presents a narrative summary of the major themes that emerged from focus forum conversations with participants who expanded on and discussed the survey information. The conversational interviews were used to establish background material for the research problem and to gather information for the development of the survey instrument. The survey and the focus group forums were the primary data gathering sources.

Conversational Interviews

Eight interviews were conducted with interviewees selected for their recognized experiences and understanding of the statewide educational community. All interviewees were asked the same three broad questions: "Do you believe there is a shortage of applicants for the position of school superintendent?" "Why do you think individuals are or are not seeking the superintendency?" "Do you have any suggestions

concerning what to do about the current perception that there aren't enough people interested in the school superintendency?"

Everyone interviewed believed there was a shortage of candidates applying to be a school superintendent, and some made comments, similar to those in the literature, that there is a negative view of leadership as a whole. One of the acting superintendents said, "There is an overall negative perception of the job that is played out in the media and the news that has to be affecting candidates." Another interviewee who conducts superintendent searches expressed it in these words: "The public is not seeing the superintendents as credible, but that is true of other professions, also, like senators. People's attitude on leadership is not good, they pick them apart." The other search consultant in talking more specifically about the shortage said, "The system is not working...fewer and fewer young people are following the career path of teacher to principal, principal to superintendent." He went on to say that in his experience, "Districts used to get 50 to 60 applicants per opening, now they are lucky to get 20 and only 10 of those may be viable candidates. Candidates often play musical chairs moving amongst the desirable jobs, which does not increase the pool, rather it just shifts it around." Finally, he felt there was a current shortage, but not as severe as the one that would develop in the year 2003 as acting superintendents chose to retire. He believed many of the current superintendents were staying in their positions to take advantage of new laws that would increase their potential retirement benefits, "but that advantage will disappear by the year 2003, creating a possible exodus."

The director of the educational institute at one of the universities in the state commented, "Role models we have for leadership are of the old school. People don't think schools or their leaders are meeting society's needs." Further he said he believed, "The State of Iowa will move to a negative supply and strong demand situation for the future." He based his comments on a 1997 survey, conducted by the institute, which found that half of the state's 360 superintendents planned to retire by 2004, including a third who planned to retire by 2003.

The director of the state's superintendents' professional organization, School Administrators of Iowa (SAI) who is responsible for the multiple publications that are disseminated by that organization, referred to their annual report in which was written the following:

Last year SAI continued the initiative to address the administrator shortage. Several subcommittees worked to coordinate a multi-faceted, relentless effort to protect and promote excellence in educational leadership. Our dedication to play a part in eliminating this crisis will not waiver. Schools of significance, like our schools, need strong leaders.

Both researchers interviewed confirmed what the other interviewees had voiced about the perceived shortage of candidates for the superintendent of school's position. One who had studied the criteria school boards used during the 1994-95 school year to select superintendents said she found that most school boards claimed they wanted a "transformational leader, who had a vision and could empower others" to change the way things were being done; but in the end she found most districts wound up hiring "nice guys that would provide smooth sailing." The other researcher reported she had studied women superintendents in the state of Iowa during the early 1990s and said she

felt her study was not at all well received because her findings indicated the existence of "A Good ol' Boy" network, which in many ways seemed to hamper the hiring of women candidates.

In responding to the second question, Why do you think individuals are or are not seeking the superintendency? interviewees focused primarily on why they thought individuals weren't applying rather than why they were applying. In terms of why individuals weren't interested in the position interviewees enumerated multiple barriers they perceived were stifling the possible candidate pool. Following are the major themes interviewees considered as barriers.

Salary

Six of the interviewees felt the job was not compensated at a sufficient level, making salary one of the main barriers contributing to a low candidate pool. The reasons they gave were that the financial compensation did not sufficiently make up for the stress level and visibility demands of the job, and if you compare per diem pay of the superintendent with that of teachers and principals, there is not a sufficient difference that most people feel compensates for the additional roles and responsibilities. One of the search consultants described the pay differential in these terms, "A \$46,000 to \$56,000 a year principal is not going to go to a smaller rural area to be a superintendent for less money than they are currently receiving." Further, he stated that, "Most community people think that \$50,000 is a large sum of money--really it (salary) should be closer to \$75,000." One of the acting superintendents posed his answer in the form of a question, "Why would anyone pay to go and get the endorsement and take

on that job, when they can stay in teaching and make as much?" The director of the educational institute added an additional observation regarding teacher vs. superintendent pay when he pointed out that, "A husband and wife team of teachers can easily make \$60,000 to \$70,000." They can do this during a nine-month contract, while a superintendent's contract is typically three months longer and for less money.

Nature of the Job

All of the interviewees believed the job itself presented many negatives adding considerable stress to the lives of those holding the position. The field services director and search consultant in commenting on the demanding nature of the hours to do the job said, "there are no eight hour days." And one of the acting superintendents talked about the "commitment being way beyond past years--now it is all encompassing leaving no time for a private life."

Both of the acting superintendents, the two search consultants, and the executive director of the professional organization cited tenure as a barrier associated with the position. The acting superintendent from the large district said, "Boards turn over their superintendent about every five years. My question is, 'Why?' Aren't they the board that hired that superintendent!" Arguing a reverse observation, one of the search consultants stated that, "The board that hires you is not always the board that fires you." In a further comment on boards, the acting superintendent of the smaller district stated his belief that, "Boards are not allowing superintendents to do their jobs. They (the boards) are micro-managing. The whole structure of the job has changed from past years." He believed that type of behavior, "interference and

distrust" was a major cause for conflict between boards and their superintendents. He went on to say, "When that pattern emerges, you're out!"

Speaking from experience one of the acting superintendents said, "It's a very lonely job. It doesn't allow for enough contact with kids or colleagues." Another interviewee said it this way, "It even causes problems with your friendships! You have no personal life in a 50-mile radius because everyone knows you. You're so visible." Another interviewee called it just a "fishbowl".

Superintendents used to have much more authority and autonomy, and must now play in a highly political arena, lamented one of the acting superintendents. Special interest groups that demand their own agenda or diverse groups with diverse thoughts that depart from mainstream American culture, he believed found it "very easy to throw stones at the superintendent rather than work toward solutions."

Minority Candidates

In talking about minority candidates (racial, ethnic, gender), the interviewees believed it was hard to attract minority candidates to a state whose population although changing is still very homogenous. The executive director of the educational institute felt very strongly that colleges and universities, "Are not preparing people to be superintendents that have the skills and knowledge to deal with diverse cultures and diverse thoughts." He further commented that, "Many religious right organizations don't even allow women to serve on their boards."

Regarding gender, the two female doctoral students shared their belief that many school boards would not genuinely look at female candidates. Women are perceived, said one of the doctoral students, as "not being able to cut it" on the tough issues like drugs and weapons in school or the savvy to handle the "Bs", baseball (sports), buses, and budgets. The other doctoral student referred to the findings of her research, which confirmed that women in the superintendency in Iowa in the early 1990's experienced, "harassment, discrimination, abuse, isolation, and pain."

Satisfaction with Current Job

In talking with an individual that one interviewee believed would make an excellent superintendent, he was told, 'I'm prepared, but why should I leave this principal's job. I have a good salary, my wife is employed in this district, and I have a high degree of satisfaction with what I do.' Another interviewee called it "an attitude of the active applicant pool--a level of satisfaction with their current job." A secondary principal told one interviewee, "In interviews I get the sense that I'm not going to be able to do what I want to do in education. I'm happy here, and don't want to go anywhere else." He went on to tell the interviewee how long he and his family had been a part of their current community and the importance of the respect he felt he had gained there. He knew he was in demand, but saw the superintendency as a, "no respect, no opportunity" position.

Preparation

Citing a need for more emphasis and training on skills such as team building, conflict management, facilitation, and defining vision, the executive director of the educational institute felt that individuals are "not being prepared to be superintendents in today's schools. They are no longer just business managers. They must be able to collaborate with the community and the media."

One of the acting superintendents poignantly described a sense of being overwhelmed, when he first took on his position, "with the Federal, State, Special Education, and Personnel laws and guidelines that bombard public schools." Another interviewee was concerned that, "no one ever mentions the good parts (of being a superintendent)."

The third and final question asked the interviewees was, "Do you have any suggestions concerning what to do about the current perception that there aren't enough people interested in the school superintendency?" Some answers were as simple as "pay more" and "hire more assistants to take part of the load" or "cut the hours demanded." However the overriding theme that emerged from the various interviews was the concept of mentoring, mentoring in the form of learning the job of being a superintendent, from individuals already acting as superintendents.

One interviewee said, "someone has to ignite that passion for being a school leader," and he believed it had to come from those already in the job. The field director and search consultant had similar words saying, "someone has to encourage them, make them want to be the head administrator." The acting superintendent of the smaller district

felt, "districts should groom their own superintendent candidates to take over when a vacancy occurred." He went on to say that this might work well for large districts, but perhaps smaller districts would not have the "breadth of potential candidates." Another interviewee shared his belief that, "most superintendents are too busy to truly mentor another aspiring or new superintendent," and districts cannot afford to release their potential candidates from their own administrator responsibilities to let them spend time learning skills from a superintendent in another district. He called it, "a built in ceiling on the needed training." Beyond their college preparation program and regular internship requirement, he believed aspiring superintendents had limited access to "hands-on" training.

Looking beyond training to a totally different approach to filling vacancies, one of the search consultants warned, "if the educational community does not solve its leadership crisis, others will." He believed if the State of Iowa were to change licensure to be a school administrator, dropping the requirement that an individual has to have teaching experience, the MBA's could and would take over as school superintendents. Of course, he said, "the emphasis would move away from instruction and center on management."

Summary of Conversational Interviews

Calling on their personal experiences, knowledge, and contacts with other educational colleagues, the eight interviewees confirmed the perception that Iowa is facing a shortage of individuals willing to be school superintendents. In responding to why they believed this shortage

had developed, they shared their beliefs about the position in terms of salary, nature of the job, minority candidates, satisfaction of potential candidates with the job they already held, and preparation programs for superintendents. Finally, they gave their suggestions for how to address the shortage. The suggestion mentioned by all eight interviewees was the need for mentoring--the process of having aspiring superintendents spend time with and learn how to be a superintendent from acting superintendents.

Survey

A two-page survey containing 36 items was mailed to 315 individuals in the State of Iowa who were endorsed to be a superintendent, but were not, at that time, serving as a school superintendent. The survey was designed to determine the respondent's job seeking status, demographic information, and personal perceptions and experiences surrounding the job of school superintendent. Two hundred twenty-two respondents returned the survey for a 70.4% return rate. It is important to note that not all 222 respondents answered every question. This may have been the result of confusion with the directions on the form. Therefore, for clarity, the number responding to the question is included with the displayed data. The following presents an item-by-item account of the data gathered.

The first six items on the survey asked the respondents to report their status as a candidate for a superintendent's position. Their responses gave a clear indication that most of the respondents were not seeking a superintendency, nor would they be in the next five years. The

responses also reflected a dramatic drop-off in the number of applications after the respondents had tried five times. See Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1

Job Status of the Respondents Concerning the Superintendency

Question	Number of Responses*	Percentage
I have applied for a superintendent position but have never been offered or accepted one	62	28.8
I have never applied for a superintendent's position	135	62.7
I have been a school district superintendent, but I am currently in another position	18	8.3

*Number that responded (215 out of 222)

Table 2

Application Status of the Respondents Concerning the Superintendency

Question	Number of Responses*	Percentage
A How many superintendent positions have you applied for in the last five years?		
A. 1-5	55	24.7
B. 6-8	4	0.018
C. 9-11	3	0.013
D. Above 11	2	0.009
None	158	71.1
B Are you currently seeking a superintendent's position?		
Yes	23	21.6
No	83	78.3
C Will you be seeking a superintendent's Position in the near future? (within 5 years)		
Yes	58	31.3
No	127	68.6

* Number that responded (A-222 out of 222, B-106 out of 222, C-185 out of 222)

In order to understand why respondents weren't seeking superintendent positions the next question on the survey asked them to rank their rationale concerning 22 barriers that interviewees from the conversational interviews and information from current research indicated might be reasons for why people were not seeking the job. Listed in Table 3 are the 22 items in order (highest to lowest) 3.94-1.30 by mean score as ranked by the respondents.

Table 3

Barriers as Ranked by Respondents

Variable	Mean Score	Number of Responses*	Label
Item 7	3.94	115	Satisfaction with Current Job
Item 5	3.28	116	Impact on Family
Item 13	3.21	114	Too Political
Item 6	2.85	115	Stress Level of Job
Item 21	2.80	116	Absence of Sup. Experience
Item 8	2.76	114	Instability in Length of Job
Item 1	2.73	117	Inability to Relocate
Item 12	2.43	114	Lack of Support
Item 10	2.40	116	Insufficient Salary
Item 22	2.35	113	Negative Perceptions
Item 2	2.32	115	Isolated Nature of Position
Item 9	2.32	116	Nearing Retirement
Item 15	2.23	115	Complexity of Budget Formula
Item 3	2.16	115	Excessive Time Commitment
Item 14	2.13	115	Restricted Networking
Item 17	2.04	115	Requisite Doctoral Degree
Item 19	1.96	114	Insufficient Retirement System
Item 16	1.95	114	12-Month Assignment
Item 11	1.93	115	Lack of Resources
Item 18	1.74	115	Lack of Information on Jobs
Item 4	1.63	116	Gender
Item 20	1.30	115	Ethnic

* Number who responded (113-117 out of 222)

In the conversational interviews minority issues, especially gender, surfaced from the women interviewees as a major barrier. However gender ranked next to the bottom in the list of 22 barriers. One hundred

seventy-eight of the respondents were male with only 43 being female. Because of the low ranking given to the gender issue by all the respondents, gender did not appear very important. However, when the 22 items were cross-tabulated by gender, females did perceive gender a barrier. In fact, instead of ranking next to the bottom it moved to second from the top. The female respondent's top five responses are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Barriers Ranked by Women Respondents

Variable	Mean Score	Number of Responses*	Label
Item 7	3.78	21	Satisfaction With Current Job
Item 4	3.67	22	Gender
Item 21	3.50	22	Absence of Sup. Experience
Item 1	3.39	23	Inability to Relocate
Item 5	3.28	22	Impact on Family

To establish a portrait of who was the superintendent-endorsed population, items 23 through 28 asked for demographic information. Presented on Figures 1A through 3A are pie graphs depicting the data regarding the respondents' current position, age, race/ethnic classification, highest degree, and years to retirement. Figures 3B and 4A and 4B also present the findings on how respondents secure job information, gather their perceptions of the superintendency, and what motivated them to secure their endorsement.

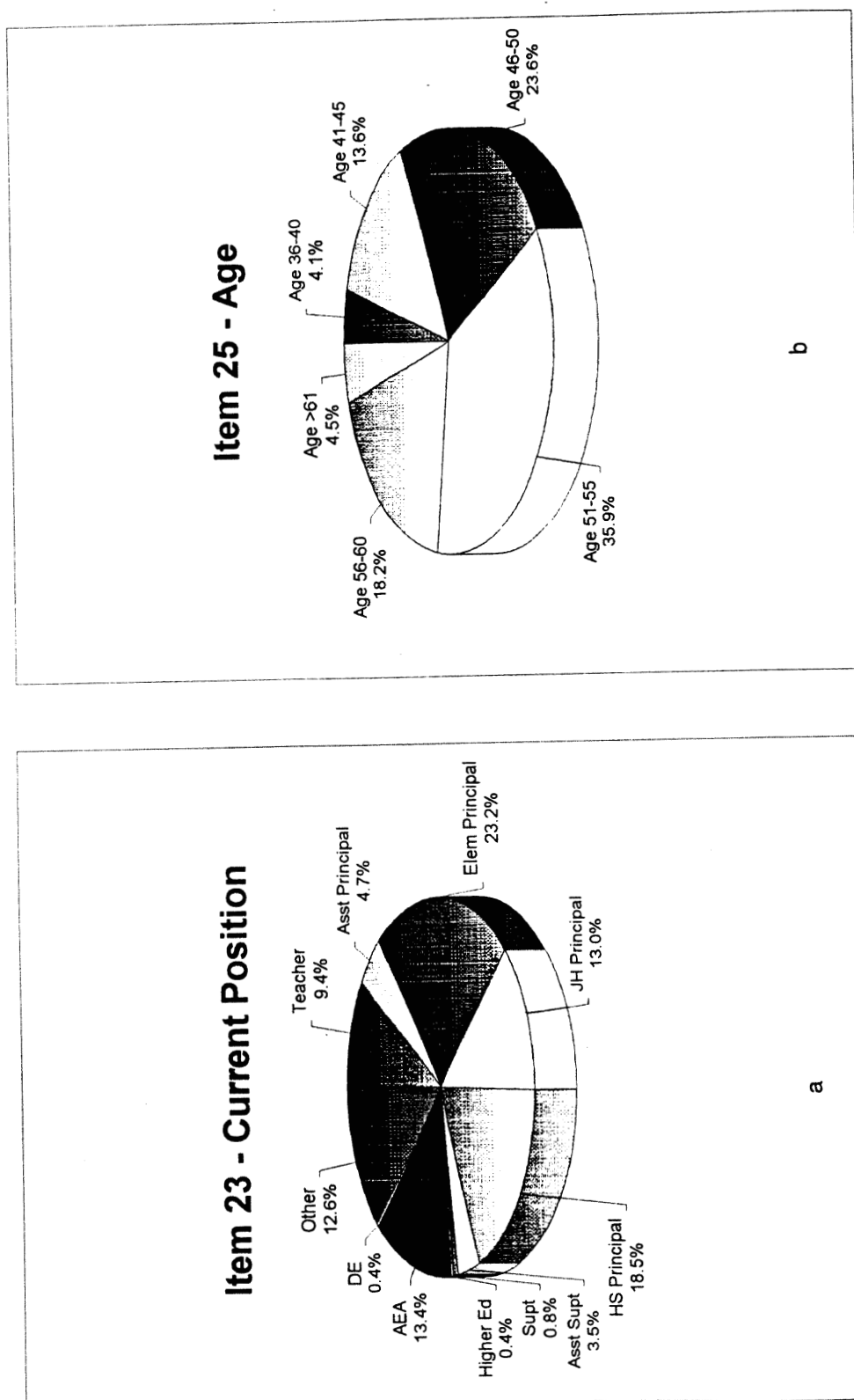


Figure 1. (a) Current position, (b) Age.

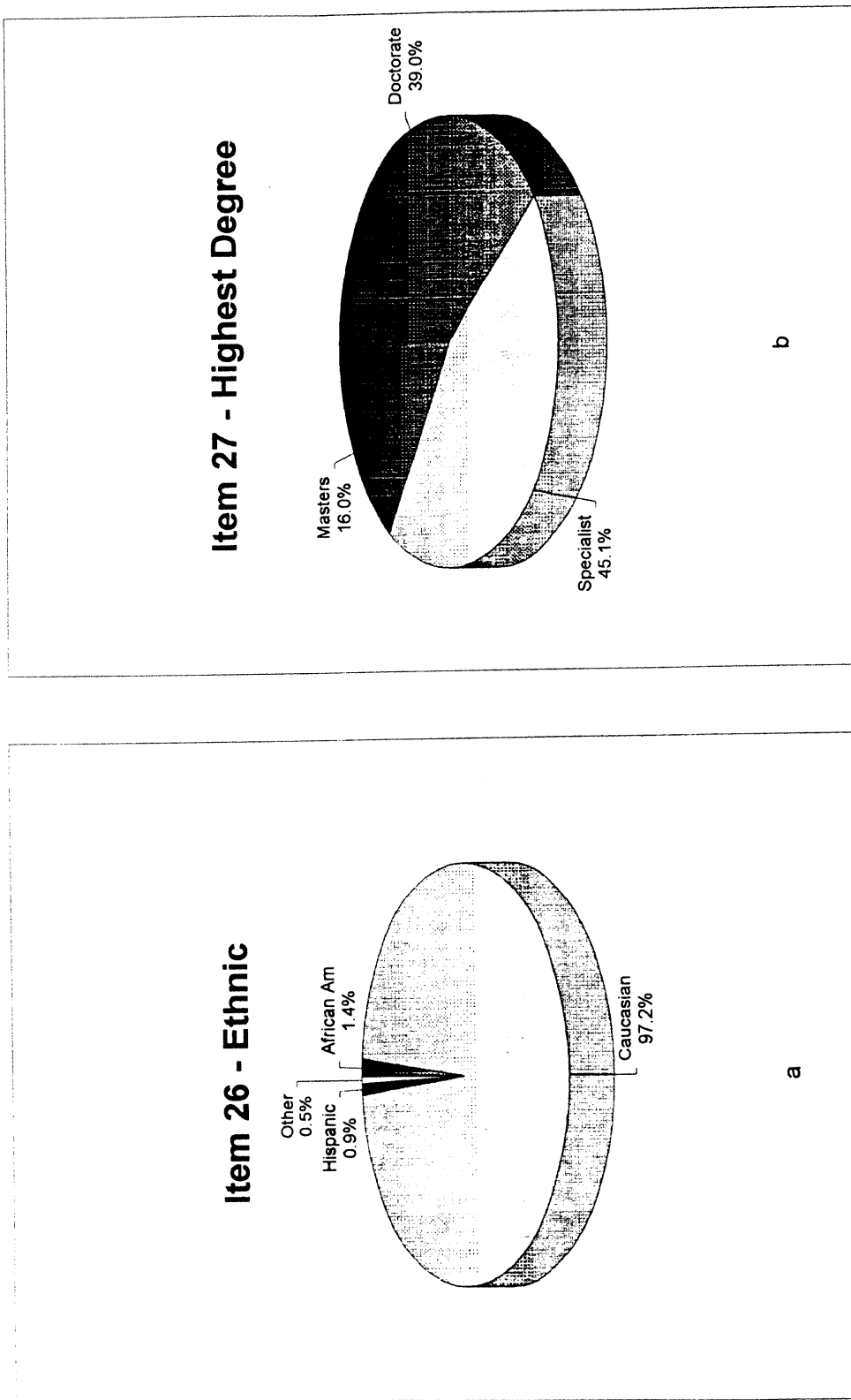
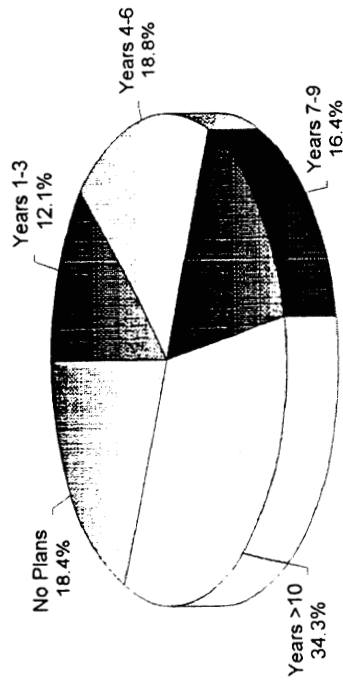


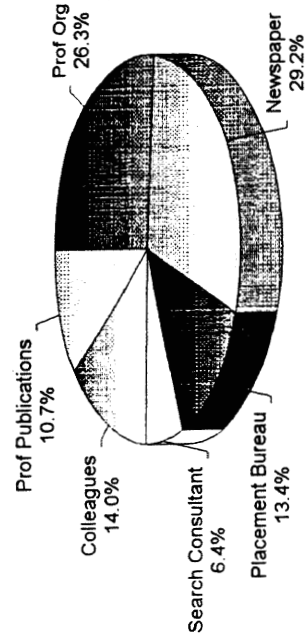
Figure 2. (a) Ethnic, (b) Highest degree.

Item 28 - Years to Retirement



a

Item 29 - Secure Job Information



b

Figure 3. (a) Years to retirement, (b) Secure job information.

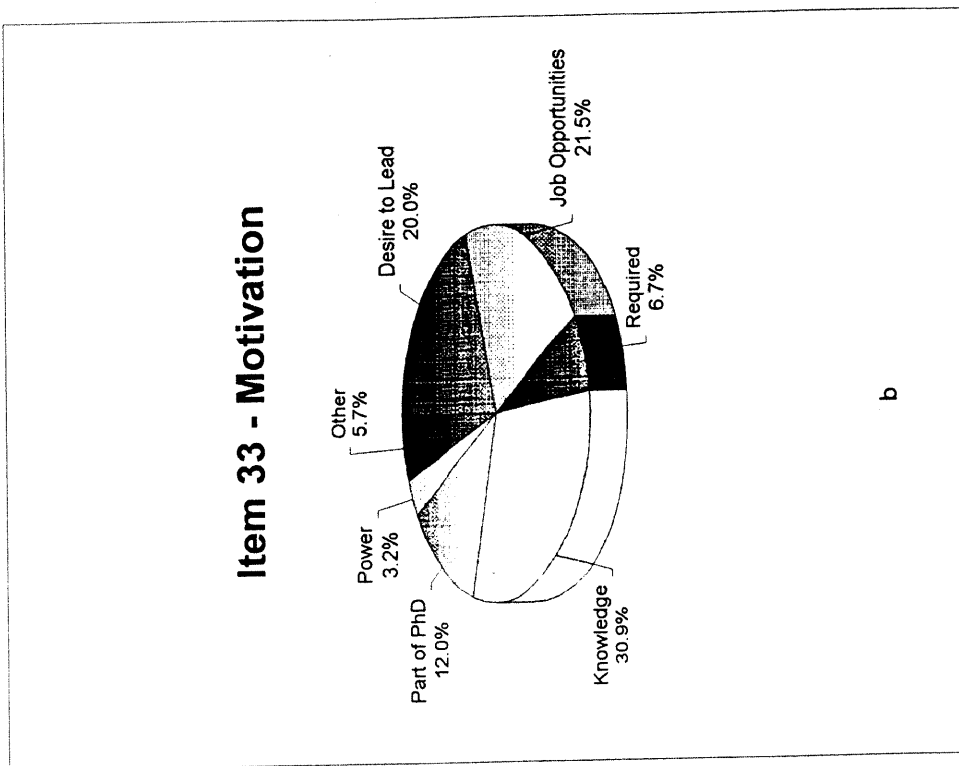
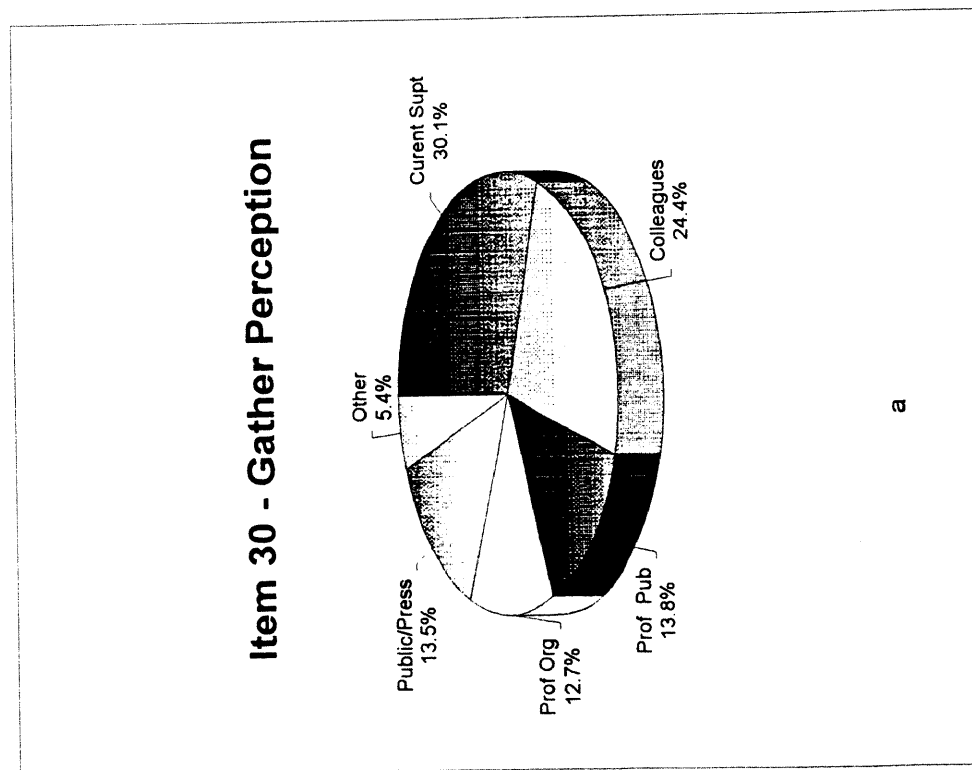


Figure 4. (a) Gather perception, (b) Motivation.

Item 23 / Figure 1A / Current Position

The largest percentage (23%) of people by position were those holding elementary principalships. The elementary principalship also boasted the strongest number overall in female administrators. In 1997 in "The School Administrator Shortage: Leadership in Crisis" a report to the Executive Council for School Administrators of Iowa, the female administrators in the State of Iowa were shown as distributed in these numbers: Superintendents - 15, High School Principals - 10, Middle School Principals - 41, and Elementary Principals - 233.

When Item 23 was cross-tabulated with Item C (Will you be seeking a superintendent's position in the near future?) about one-third of all the respondents said they would consider the position. The largest numbers were in the ranks of junior high school and high school principals. The groups showing the lowest interest in pursuing a position were the elementary principals and assistant superintendents. The "other" category in Item 23, which accounted for 13% of the responses, was composed of those respondents who hold positions as directors, usually in central office positions in curriculum or athletics. There was also one unique group of respondents; over 90% of those holding AEA positions would not seek a superintendency.

Item 24 / Gender

A pie graph for gender was not printed because it represented just two numbers--Males accounted for 80.4% of the respondents and women accounted for 19.6%. The possible candidate pool was dominated four to one in favor of males. Because of this disparity certain items, during

analysis, were cross tabulated by gender to ascertain if findings changed or remained constant.

Item 25 / Figure 1B / Age

The major percentage (35.9%) of the respondents in Item 25 fell in the 51-55 age range, followed closely by those in the 56-60 age range with 18.2%. Those percentages confirmed statements made in the conversational interviews about the number of potential retirees in the near future. Not only do the percentages illuminate a possible loss in physical numbers, for the future leadership of Iowa's schools it represents a loss of years and years of experience.

Item 26 / Figure 2A / Ethnic Classification

As mentioned in most of the current literature, and in this study, the possible candidate pool for the job of superintendent is overwhelmingly Caucasian (97.2%). In fact, the endorsed population as viewed with Item 24 on gender was definitely white male.

Item 27 / Figure 2B / Highest Degree

Those holding a specialist degree, at 45%, were most prevalent with the number of doctorates recorded at 38%. Sixteen percent of the respondents held Masters degrees, and they must have specifically chosen to take additional classes to secure the superintendent's endorsement because it is normally not included in a Master's program.

Item 28 / Figure 3A / Years to Retirement

Almost half (47.3%) of the respondents recorded that they planned to retire in less than nine years. That 47% is not considering any

changes that might occur in the coming years with the retirement laws for the state. If the laws were to change in favor of early retirees the percentage of retirees could significantly climb.

Item 29 / Figure 3B / Secure Job Information

Besides the numerical data and demographics, it was important to find out how the respondents secured their information on job openings. They could not apply or consider jobs that they knew nothing about. The major percentage (29.2%) of the respondents relied on the local statewide newspaper advertisement section. Possible candidate's second source of information on job openings was through their professional organizations, like SAI, NASSP, and AASA which publish vacancy bulletins throughout the year.

Item 30 / Figure 4A / Gather Perception

All through the conversational interviews perceptions were put forth by the interviewees about the job of superintendent of schools. Where then would respondents turn when they wanted to know the specifics "or inside story" about the job and its demands? Over half of the respondents said they turned to current superintendents (30.1%) or to colleagues (24.4%) when they wanted to know about the superintendency. This item established superintendents and others from the educational community as key conduits of information about the superintendency. A further question could be posed: Do males and females use the same sources when acquiring information about the superintendency? The cross tabulation of Item 30 by gender gave a clear indication that both groups secure their information about the superintendency from current

superintendents and colleagues. However, females tended to rely more heavily on information from the public/press than did males.

Items 31 and 32 were tied together to address respondent's views on their formal education and skill preparation. On a one to five scale, 1 being low and 5 being high, respondents ranked their experiences as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Do You Feel Your University Program Adequately Prepared You to be a Superintendent?

Scale	Number of Responses*	Percentage
1 Low	9	4.3
2	17	8.1
3	67	32.2
4	83	39.9
5 High	32	15.3

* Number who responded (208 out of 222)

Over 50% of the respondents gave high marks (4s and 5s) to their superintendent preparation programs. However, preparation to be a superintendent was one of the key themes to emerge from the conversational interviews so respondents were asked in Item 32 to write one positive change they would suggest for their preparation program. Reported here in narrative form are the key suggestions that emerged from the 132 responses. Over 75% of the suggestions centered on providing some form of internship, mentorship, or practicum, for prospective superintendents. This key suggestion of mentorships was

written and expressed in many different, words, yet similar thoughts, i.e., "Provide a twelve weeks or longer practicum with an acting superintendent," or "Time for working side by side with a superintendent, either during the summer months or school year," or "I think it is imperative prior to certification that an individual fulfill on-the-job training for at least a month."

One respondent wrote that the practicum experience should be designed like the medical model with seven or eight students working at the same time with various superintendents. Another respondent admonished candidates need to be exposed to, "a brief internship or induction program, which would realistically describe the life of a superintendent." A third respondent simply wrote, "a paid internship similar to that of teaching."

Accounting for 12% of the responses, the second key suggestion to emerge also placed an emphasis on training, specific training to deal with finances. Iowa has what many, including the respondents in this study, believe is a very complex funding and reporting formula for school budgets. Most of the written answers were very short and to the point about what to give graduate students in their university programs, i.e., "better preparation for managing budget" or "more actual budgeting experiences" and "more course work in finance and law," or "an opportunity to take courses from both education and business colleges." Taking the suggestion a step further a respondent wrote that periodic instruction on, "current school budget processes and current school law updates should be made mandatory." Another respondent wrote a personal lament, "More on budgeting! I just don't feel prepared fully in this

area." One respondent summed the issue up this way, "Superintendents should be required to hold a Ph.D. with an equivalent of an MBA (financial management) included within the Ph.D. program. Minimum salary should then be \$100,000 per year."

Five percent of the responses focused on instruction on LEADERSHIP. Again most answers were short and direct, "give us more about leadership, relationships, and the visioning process," or "provide well researched leadership training seminars." One respondent wanted more on the, "ceremonial leadership requirements associated with administrative positions." Still another wanted to have been, "better prepared to deal with the role of technology in education." A third called for nuts and bolts training on, "public relations, politics, and dealing with the media, negotiations, and difficult parents, employees, and board members," while a fourth respondent added to that suggestion by requesting, "more on philosophy, ethics, multiculturalism, and equity." Being very specific a respondent delineated the teaching practices he/she thought should be included in any preparation program, "innovative practices (e.g. cooperative learning, competency-based education, authentic assessment/rubrics, applied academics, etc.) and some experience teaching these so they (superintendents) know and can evaluate more than traditional methods."

When commenting on the process of seeking a superintendent's position respondents wanted a stronger emphasis on networking, greater attention to information on spin off careers other than just being a superintendent, and much greater activity by their college placement offices. Isolated suggestions on preparation to be a superintendent were

"drop the dissertation, more specifics on stress management, and let current superintendents teach the classes." Two respondents were very pleased with their training one saying, "My program was excellent," and the other "it (my program) was exceptional."

Item 33 / Figure 4B / Motivation

In order to try and determine why people would spend the time and money to secure an endorsement that they perhaps would never use, item 33 was created. It asked respondents what motivated them to secure their superintendent endorsement.

The largest percentage (30%), responded they had secured their superintendent endorsement to broaden their knowledge. Obviously for the respondents a rewarding goal, but not a strong indication in terms of numbers seeking the superintendency. However 21% stated that they wanted to enhance their job opportunities, and coupled with the 20% that secured their endorsement because of a desire to lead, the picture improves for possible applicants for school superintendent.

In order to stimulate thinking about the superintendent shortage Item 34 listed several options that could be checked by the respondents as having the greatest impact on alleviating the shortage. See Table 6.

Overwhelmingly the respondents' preference was to review and rethink the position of superintendent. Salary, benefits, and time commitments had all also been mentioned during the conversational interviews as barriers to candidates seeking a position. Item 35 then asked the respondents what suggestions they might add to those listed above. One hundred forty-four suggestions were submitted. Many of the

Table 6

Which of These Suggestions Do You Feel Will Make the Greatest Impact on Alleviating Our Current Shortage of Superintendent Candidates?

Question*	Number	Percentage
Changes in administrator certification and preparation programs	45	11.7
Review and rethink the position of superintendent (salary, benefits, time commitment, etc.)	151	39.5
Public relations efforts	76	19.8
Identification and recruitment of candidates	93	24.3
Changes in job postings	17	4.5

* This item reflects check-all-that-apply type responses.

answers were duplicates, and a number touched on areas, like mentoring, that had already been thoroughly discussed in the data presented so far. Therefore, the following 26 responses, listed in random sequence, were included here to provide the reader further understanding because of the unique or different perspective offered by some of the respondents:

- . Give the superintendent veto power over the board.
- . The superintendent should be paid at the level of a chief executive officer of a similar size business or corporation.
- . Someone needs to tell boards that the superintendency is important. Tenure in a position is important to establish constancy of purpose.
- . Money is always a big issue to districts. Maybe the government could work on ways to better this.
- . Attract more bright, young professionals into teaching; then mentor them in to positions that require leadership ability.
- . Longer contract provisions--many possible female candidates with children are looking for job security within a community

rather than a stepladder approach to a more prestigious position.

- . Educating the public and making them aware of the difficulty of the position.
- . Give boards of education and superintendents back the power to run the schools. Less power to unions, legislatures, and special interest groups.
- . Re-think role of small schools; do schools of 500 or less need a full-time superintendent?
- . A perceptual change at the board level on what constitutes effective leadership; this is an issue in Iowa. If you can't golf, coach, or understand boilers, it's tough!
- . Give minorities an opportunity even in the predominately white districts.
- . Change current educational laws in Iowa. School superintendents and districts are handcuffed by educational laws that are too restrictive. Superintendents have to deal with too much red tape and cannot be true leaders.
- . More legal protection.
- . AEAs could help in establishing support positions (consultants) specifically in school finance and budgeting.
- . Create a registry of available candidates.
- . Well-planned career ladders, on the job professional development, educational leave opportunities.
- . Break through the glass ceiling for women as perceived by school board members.
- . Legislation is necessary to TEMPORARILY certify CEOs, retired military, etc., and consideration for boards to take over like county supervisors and run the district by committee with pay!
- . Change requirement that one has to keep taking courses to keep up certification.
- . Smaller districts may have to share superintendents--in two or three districts, the superintendent may have to divide the position by specialty--one may do finance, one do curriculum, etc.

- . Recruit the best--poor superintendents do more harm to the profession and make it tougher on everyone by their poor and just plain dumb way of dealing with people/issues.
- . Too often a Ph.D. is required.
- . Districts may wish to investigate third party options for district management services.
- . It's almost like one becomes a superintendent when they have nothing better to live for--it's insecure, very public, and not as prestigious as in the past.
- . White males dominate and make meetings very uncomfortable for competent women. In some cases they refuse/resist very good programs because of ego problems and inertia.
- . Courses on how to walk on water!

The final Item of the survey Item 36 was designed to garner the applicant's personal thoughts about becoming a superintendent. It asked, "What specifically would entice you to seek a superintendent position?" Sixty-two percent of the total responses, or 156 comments, were either duplications of thoughts, one-word responses, or topics that had already been recorded from the data. For the remaining responses (38%) the written comments were sorted to establish themes that reflected new insights and here recorded.

Most often written were negative responses leaving a clear indication that many in the candidate pool were not interested in becoming a superintendent. Those responses were as simple as, "I can't imagine" and "absolutely nothing" or more colorfully, "nothing on God's green earth!" One respondent gave their train of thought on the issue, "I don't know if I ever would. Demands/pressure of job and unrealistic job expectation certainly very unattractive. High rate of turnover. Family would need to relocate repeatedly. Money is not EVERYTHING!"

For those who would consider the job their thoughts centered on recruitment. They wanted to be asked to become a superintendent. A respondent wrote, "If I was asked to apply by the board of education or other people in the community." Another said, "Active recruitment for people like me who do not move through the traditional pipeline, teacher to principal to superintendent." A female respondent lamented, "It is my opinion that headhunters do not seek qualified female candidates. All else being equal, qualified males are more frequently recruited. We still have a closed, good-ol'-boys network operating in Iowa."

A commitment to students was a consideration that would make the job more attractive to some respondents. They made statements like, "Spend time talking about students, not buying floor wax!" or "If the superintendent's position would allow me to focus on staff growth and student achievement." Respondents looking on a broader scale talked about districts in connection with job attractiveness saying, "A district that has a good board, willing to look forward, and community support for the TOTAL educational program." Or "A district commitment to learning coupled with an understanding that learning is measured by the inch--not the mile--very complicated." The most specific statement was, "An opening in a mid-sized school with a staff open to instructional challenge of preparing students for the 21st century and willing to work and develop curriculum and program toward that end. Where you can spend time and see results for kids."

Location, location, location, or not relocating was written by many of the respondents. They wanted the "right job, right place, right time." Due to the higher ranking given by females as opposed to the

predominately male rankings, of the "inability to relocate" statement on the list of barriers in Tables 3 and 4, Item 36 was cross tabulated by gender. In the responses given, however, location, or more accurately not having to relocate and family considerations, were concerns equally expressed by both males and females.

One female said, "I'm happy where I am. I might consider a small superintendency within a reasonable commute when my family is raised." Another female wrote, "I'm specifically interested in a position as superintendent of elementary education in larger school district after our daughter completes high school in 1999." A third listed conditions necessary before contemplating a move, "Better contract, better pay, longer contracts--multi-year so risk taking is worth the move."

The male respondents, except for one, were much more succinct in their written answers, saying, "Location for a two professional family," or "Location in central Iowa area," or "Opportunity within my geographic region." One respondent did elaborate on his concern with these words, "I have strong feelings in this area. I have turned down three offers. Do not like the philosophy of starting in a small district and moving up. Will NOT locate my family in a community we do not want to live in and HOPE something better opens up."

A single voice wrote for the MINORITY issue of ethnic classification saying he wished for, "Honesty and the opportunity without the nonsense of being told we're looking for qualified candidates (is the word qualified applied only to persons of the right color?)" Two other male voices, although not writing about the minority issue, called for altered attitudes, saying, "There has to be a change

in public perception by the general public, that the school superintendent is a 'throw away' commodity," and a consideration for the job, "If boards wanted a leader and not just a political puppet."

Although there were more negative responses than positive ones about seeking a superintendent's position, several did sense a certain irony in filling out the survey, "It's ironic to fill out a shortage survey and I can't seem to get a job!" Another said, "I am very interested at this time due to a change in our local district." A candidate, who specifically answered, with a play on words, the question posed in Item 36 said, "I'm already enticed, highly qualified, and eager."

Summary of Survey

With 222 surveys returned out of the 315 mailed, the respondents' answers gave a forceful representation of the endorsed pool for the State of Iowa and their beliefs about the job of superintendent of schools. The respondents to the survey were predominately white males, in the 51 and older age bracket, who planned to retire within the next nine years, most held a specialist degree and were not currently seeking a superintendent's position. The study respondents also ranked what they believed were the most significant barriers that face possible candidates. The top six barriers were Satisfaction with Current Job, Impact on Family, Too political, Stress Level of Job, Absence of Superintendent Experience, and Instability in Length of Job. The minority voice was heard through the cross tabulation of data; changing the ranking of the barriers to include Gender and Ethnic Classification.

Respondents were generous with their short written responses to questions about superintendent preparation programs, sources of information about the superintendency, and their own interest in seeking the job.

Focus Group Forums

Three focus forums were held in different regions (one in central Iowa, one in the eastern half, one in the western half) of the state of Iowa, to provide a geographical representation of the superintendent endorsed population. Participants were selected to establish, as much as possible, a balance in minorities, age, and educational background. The executive director of the state administrators' professional organization helped the researcher identify the participants, and also served as the moderator for the focus forum sessions. Using focus forums allowed participants, in a guided discussion format, to expand on the data gathered through the returned surveys.

Keeping that rationale (expanding the survey data) in mind the moderator opened each forum with a discussion of the top six barriers as ranked by the respondents to the survey. Those six were Satisfaction with Current Job, Impact on Family, Too Political, Stress Level, Absence of Experience, Instability in Length of Job. Included in that discussion was a seventh barrier, Minority, which had surfaced from the cross tabulation of the survey data.

Other topics, in addition to barriers, were posed by the moderator or were spontaneously initiated by the participants during the three forums. Two additional areas emerged as predominant themes and are also

recorded in this chapter. They included Budget/Salary and Positive Aspects of the Job. Another theme worth mentioning, although not raised at all three focus forums, was Charter Schools. That discussion grew out of comments made at the forum held in the western region of the state.

Still other topics recorded in this chapter arose during the forums, perhaps not at the level to be called a theme, but worthwhile in noting. Some were new thoughts and some were expansions on comments already recorded from the conversational interviews. The barriers, themes, thoughts, and expansions are presented in a narrative style capturing, as often as possible, the participant's own words. Rather than being presented as three separate forums, the findings are reported here as compilation of comments across forums.

Satisfaction With Current Job

Perhaps not viewed by most as a barrier, but definitely a factor in the lack of superintendent candidates was participant's satisfaction with their current jobs. The participants talked about not wanting to lose touch with kids, about career timing, and the "right" superintendent's position. To begin the discussion a participant talked about observing the superintendent in his district walk through his school and the kids all saying, "Who's that?" He went on to say it wasn't because the superintendent didn't care about kids, it was because the job so drained his time commitment to do all the things necessary to run a district of that size that he lost touch with them. One principal spoke eloquently about his focus:

I think moving up to the Assistant Superintendent or Superintendent takes me away from the focus I have in education and that is being close to kids. Sure you can say you affect them

as a Superintendent or an Assistant Superintendent but I don't think you ever get to know a kid any more than being able to sit down and talk with them or work with them one to one in a small group. To me that is the satisfaction of the job that I could never do without. I wouldn't want to be in education if I couldn't have that closeness.

One participant who had been a principal at the time of the survey and had in the meantime accepted a superintendency, was still welcomed at the forum and shared this comment about his new position, "Our (his former) superintendent always crowned our homecoming queen and that's going to continue (with me as superintendent). That was my biggest fear and my apprehension of even applying for the job, that I would lose contact with the kids. If I can't walk out my door and still put my hand on a kid and I don't care if it's K through 12, I'm not sure I'm going to like the superintendency."

Some of the participants felt that the size of the district could have a big impact on their interest in the job. Smaller districts were viewed as allowing more contact with students with larger districts viewed as having levels of bureaucracy. One principal described it this way, "you start to get so many levels because of all the things you're asked to do with so many programs and you have multiple levels of principals and building administrators that all of a sudden, not because you wanted to, but it's like . . . you just twist away from the contact."

"Is the timing right?" was a question posed by most of the participant's. A principal who had made several moves up the career ladder stated:

I left the classroom to become a principal because I thought I'd done probably what I could do in the classroom as a classroom teacher itself, and it was time for a change. And I think the same

thing would be true for the principalship. After I've done that for a number of years, it will be time for a change, to move on. So I don't see it (satisfaction) as a forever barrier, but I think I'm pretty happy where I'm at, and it would take something pretty special to make me want to take that next step.

Another participant wanted the whole package, "It's the right job at the right time, the right location, the right salary. Pretty much everything. It just has to be one of those things where all the stars got lined up just right, and it all fell into place." Still a third participant talked about location and opportunity being a part of it, but for him timing meant a lot. He talked about having some offers, but not wanting to move to some places in Iowa where he simply would not want to live. For me he said it will take, "Just the right time and place."

Impact on Family

For all participants in all the forums there was a nodding of heads and chorus of agreement as members began to talk about what they believed seeking a superintendent's position would mean to their families. In the majority of cases the perceived effects were negative with one principal saying: "Most families today are two income families, for me to pick up and move somewhere just to be a superintendent where my wife was at the top of the scale and to move to a different area where she might lose \$15,000 or something isn't worth it." A second participant agreed saying, "My personal situation is my wife is an elementary teacher. If she gives up her job, she is basically unemployed. Because at the most she is going to bring in 10 years experience, but she has 20 some years." This participant was referring to the practice by most school districts of only recognizing so many

years experience on their pay scale for incoming teachers. A teacher with over 20 years experience would take a substantial pay cut. Another talked about needing the support of his extended family: "even though I'm single I have an extended family in the metro area and my daughter is student teaching here and wants to stay in the area so the kind of support system that I need as a person is even more important than someone who has a mate to take with them."

All of the participants were concerned about the necessity to uproot their children and take them away from the communities, schools, and friends that they had come to love. Several felt that moving was most difficult for high school age students, but another touchingly spoke about this third grader:

I think the relocation aspect is impossible to minimize especially when you have children who are high school age or younger and they are well adjusted and have good friends and making good decisions. When you transplant them you are always taking the risk of putting them into an environment where they might not be as successful. And in my personal situation that was one thing we weren't willing to risk. Everyone knows that I was a superintendent for three days and accepted the position I'm now on. The main reason is because I walked down the hallway with my third grader after school. I looked at his face as we walked out of the building and knew that I wasn't going to take the job. I simply wasn't going to move. I couldn't do it. You guys talk about moving high school kids. I think people always tell you grade school kids would be easy to move. I don't think so.

Following the same line of thinking a participant reminisced about a decision he had made 18 years ago, and quietly began to share,

I sat with a board, second interview in a really nice situation in northwest Iowa, and I decided for the very reason we're talking about that probably it was not a good move, not a good time to take a chance on things given the comfort level at home, and the fact my kids were at a level where it was easier to stay where I was. And so eventually I said that and stayed.

He went on to add, "Now with my kids gone I'm at a point where if I look for a superintendency, it would probably be something out of state or something where I look for a situation that would be really intriguing, one where you really couldn't do anything wrong, maybe almost a hopeless case and go after that because it would be fun." He clarified his statements by specifically pointing out the fact that he could take on that challenge now without sacrificing his family.

An administrator who had moved many times to accommodate getting all the job experience he needed in various positions talked about his many moves and their impact,

It gets to the point in time when you say, you can't move anymore. When my oldest two children come home they have no connection to the high school that they left. There is no one in the community that they know because you go from the East Coast of Iowa to the West Coast of Iowa, to Oregon, and then back to Central Iowa, so you know we're not even taking hour or half hour trips to see people, we're taking three and four hour trips. So there is no connection to that community when they come home, and that has a definite impact.

It wasn't just the participant's view that determined availability to seek the position of superintendent. Two participants specifically related how their spouses had clear reservations about the position. The first participant recounted his wife's opinion and his support:

My wife doesn't want to be a superintendent's wife. In our case there is no way we want to put her in the position where she is supposed to be the "First Lady" or whatever you say of a school district. There are lots of expectations of the wife of a superintendent and that just wouldn't fit our style.

The second participant stated his wife was concerned she would be expected to, "go to everything." He went on to explain that although she was glad to go to school athletic events when their son was participating, now that he was gone, she didn't want to have to go to

all the games. She was afraid, though, that the community would pressure her to attend.

One female principal provided a similar concern, but with a different twist. She said her husband had been very supportive of her applying for positions. She shared this concern,

I looked at a couple of principalships last year that were three hours away from our home. If I had chosen to do that it would have been fine with him, but you've got to make decisions about what is really important in your life. I think part of what I considered when I looked at those jobs, was whether the perception of a female high school principal's role without a spouse in the community would be something positive or negative.

She went on to say that she was sure the same concern, maybe even heightened, would present itself if she sought a superintendency.

As a final note on spouses, one participant talked about his interview for a position in a different district. His wife was asked to participate in an interview at the same time. There was the expectation that he and his wife attend dinner with some members of the board, current administration, and the business manager. He went on to say that one candidate's wife chose not to take part in this, and he knew the candidate did not get the job. Obviously, he said, that can't be a criteria for employment, but districts expect that level of involvement.

Too Political

The job of superintendent has been described as too political. Exactly what does that mean and how do current candidates interpret the phrase "too political"? Over half of the forum participants provided explicit examples they had which in turn had influenced their perception of the political nature of the job. Most examples focused on political interactions with school boards, unions, and interest groups. In a long

poignant account one principal talked about watching his superintendent get "bushwhacked" at board meetings. He recalled his superintendent, going into a board meeting thinking things are wonderful and not having met with everyone individually, and then having the politics behind the scenes come out and he (the superintendent) loses on a 5-2 vote publicly on TV". The principal was adamant that a person doesn't recover from those things overnight, and they go on day after day. He continued saying:

In our community the egos of the board get in the way of what's right for education. In my case I don't think I could keep four people happy long enough to stay on the job, and that's what I see our superintendent doing--trying to keep people happy for the sake of politics. We have a board that is micro-managing to the death of our school right now. And our superintendents had how many, I don't know, how many board work sessions on how you become a better board, and it like goes in one ear and out the other (of those board members). For me the political issue is the biggest barrier.

Another participant told the story of watching what he thought was an outstanding and a long-standing superintendent forced to stand-by while the district evolved into a mess:

The board the eight years that I was there went from a board that sort of had the principles in mind, we're going to tell you what we want you to do and then step back and you're the expert, you're going to figure out how to do it; to a board where we are going to tell you what we want you to do, we're going to tell you how to do it, we're going to come in periodically and look over your shoulder and see that you are doing it, and if you're not doing it we're going to run you out. And that's the thing I weighed whether or not I wanted to go into a superintendency.

Another administrator mentioned how quickly the climate can change for a superintendent. He had recently served on a committee helping a district do a superintendent search. He felt there were some very good candidates, but political issues had followed them:

Several of the people that applied were really good prospects but had been damaged by something in their community that was going to travel with them. And it was political enough that they had not had a chance to solve the problem, defend themselves, or get out of town without carrying that with them. Sometimes it's not even something educational. That's the hard part. You feel like you are watched. And our board meetings are televised. I can't go very often because I just cringe.

An administrator from a small district spoke with passion about power politics "permeating in every school district". He allowed that it may have been present in large districts for a long time, and that superintendents had always had to be statesmen, state-persons, but many school board members now are enjoying, "the concept of playing power politics, whether it is actually good for the school district, good for students, people get off on it."

Two types of groups were mentioned by most of the participants as demanding a great deal of a superintendent's time and creating tension in the district's functioning--unions and pressure groups. Pressure groups were viewed as having increased in the last five to six years, as getting much better organized, and as wanting to get their members on the board so they could control what happens with curriculum. A participant called it, "high parent expectations and really short fuses." The most frequently mentioned special interest groups were Special Education and Conservative Christian Coalitions.

One participant described it this way, "It's a political job in the sense that you have pressure, and that pressure comes from those who put you there. You have all different types of groups in the community that are working for their view of education, and usually the lightning rod is the superintendent."

On unions, participants split their opinions. Some felt union tactics were detrimental and others felt that dealing with a strong union was a benefit. A female junior high principal described interaction with the union as time consuming, "Some districts not only have teachers unions, but classified staff unions, and I think that they are not always willing to work with the big picture. I guess that bothers me. Those teachers are enjoying some pretty nice benefits and lots of time is put in with those folks." However another middle school principal voiced his desire to work with a strong union.

I would much rather have a strong union to work with than a lackadaisical one or a 'don't care' type of union. Maybe my experience is a little bit different, but having come from a state where teachers associations were very strong and could go out on strike--having lived through a 35-day strike and bringing in substitute teachers for 28 days. I would much rather have a situation where the union is strong and you know where they are at instead of having a wishy-washy union where you can get kicked in the rear. There's a lack of communication, so you're spending all this time trying to communicate where a district that has a strong union you know exactly where they stand, and you can hit things head on and not get caught.

Despite the fact that participants gave both pluses and minuses to the politics of working with unions, they were very concerned about its time-consuming nature, and they found it not a particularly rewarding part of their work.

Stress Level

Stress was a thread that ran through or was touched on by almost every participant in their comments about barriers and the superintendent's position. One administrator talked about a universal high anxiety time for all superintendents--school board elections. He phrased it this way:

Is that really something I will enjoy doing annually is waiting to know what group or what candidacy will somebody run under, and how many people will be supportive or non supportive? How many times have you seen a board election where somebody is elected to get the superintendent out, that was the sole purpose? What kind of job stability is that even when you're good at what you do?

Several participants brought up other "no-win" situations that contribute to stress level, like dollars to operate on, time constraints, and visibility. When speaking of dollars a principal stated:

Now, I don't know if it's just games they play, but I've never heard of a superintendent that isn't talking about money. And I think education is an institution that everyone says, 'Well, throwing money at it isn't going to help.' But why does every other institution in our country have money thrown at them indiscriminately, but education, no? I see a lot of things we need in our district and we don't have money. It's very frustrating. Superintendents are saying this and pretty soon principals will be saying it too, 'Why that no-win job?' You're just not going to be successful. Your blood pressure is going up, diabetes, whatever, and pass away early.

Every participant listed time as a precious commodity. Many shared their experiences in trying to encourage colleagues to come into the ranks of administration only to be rebuffed by comments about it not being worth it. Their fellow administrators saw it as a move that would restrict their freedom, take up all their time, give them very little increased income, and in smaller communities demand visibility. They heard loud and clear that in many small districts the school is "the community". They also shared, "we have people now who wouldn't take \$1,500 to coach 7th grade basketball for five weeks because after 3:30 my time is my time."

A principal talking about his superintendent shared, "I come from a different world, the small town superintendency. I don't know if that job is easier or harder, but it's certainly difficult. Small town, at

junior high basketball games or anything, our superintendent is expected to make a presence at the games, the plays, the concerts, be active in his church, in the community, and that is expected of him when he takes the job.” He also shared this story about the same superintendent, “My superintendent and I joked this year that one of the secretaries is the freshman basketball coach, he was unaware she had a grandson on the team, and she said to him, ‘Well, you know, if you’d have gone to a few more of the basketball games, you’d know.’

One of the participants who had been hired as a superintendent after accepting the invitation to a forum was still welcomed and chose to attend. He added his observation:

I’ve got probably ten certified administrators who teach in my current district who don’t apply for administrative positions, reason being it’s the time issue for them. I really do think that’s it more than anything else. They realize that as building administrators, particularly as high school administrators, you’re going to work 120 nights a year. You’re going to work most Saturdays. You’re going to work in the summer. And they would like some time to play. They just do.

The “fear factor” was seen as contributing to a heightened stress level for all administrators. Participants felt that educators used to feel relatively safe in their chosen profession, but recent violent acts, like the shootings of teachers and students, have raised everyone’s concern for safety. These incidents naturally hit the newspaper, and they ring an alarm for their fellow colleagues who say, “I’m going to stay away from that job.”

Absence of Experience

Although this ranked among the top seven for barriers this category really never developed into a discussion. Most of the forum

participants saw it as a given. They likened it to getting that first administrator's job--less to do with skills and preparation--than being at the right place at the right time. An administrator in the group said it this way, "I can be an all star as a principal, and that doesn't qualify me to be a superintendent."

However, this issue sparked a lively discussion on why the participants had pursued their superintendent's endorsement. Not one of them admitted to having gotten the endorsement specifically to become a superintendent. Rather they gave a variety of reasons for attaining the endorsement. The first participant said, "I always wanted to be a central office administrator, and I talked about that quite often, and I've always liked personnel work and knowing that I would have to have a superintendent certificate to do those kinds of things. I just loved it. I think good educators are life long learners." Several felt the classes became more important than the instruction for the endorsement. The endorsement was just a nice side product. One said, "I think the networking and that socializing is a big draw, though, because you're talking to other people, and you're networking with people doing the same thing you are." However another panned the classes giving this opinion:

I think the nuts and bolts talking like this is more valuable than the philosophical crap that you get at that level. And to me, if I could get into the certification business and actually have say on certification, it would be on-the-job training. You know, you pay this money and you're going to go work at some school. The same amount of time you would have gone to classes. That work is far more valuable.

With a thoughtful look another participant said, "I'm still not sure that what I'm doing now is where I want to stay at the end of my

career. It was kind of insurance, whether I moved into superintendency or if I moved into a larger district and was a director of curriculum instruction." A third offered, "I guess I did it at the time because I was young and somewhat cocky and a little bit disillusioned by living in a larger district, and then getting an administrative job in a smaller district. However, a middle sized district has kind of altered my perception," Then a female participant added a comment about the requirements of her district, "We were an NCA school and you need 15 more hours to be an NCA principal, so okay. I'll do that. And I got halfway through the program and thought what in the world is 15 hours going to do for me, so let's do another 15 and have that endorsement."

Instability in Length of Job

Most of the participants in the forums were not surprised at the numbers, stated by the moderator when he shared statistics for administrators, regarding longevity of a superintendent in the position:

Right now we've had about 50 superintendent openings for next year. We had that many this year, and that's right on target over the last five years. We've had about 60 superintendent openings a year and you know that's about 20 percent turnover so in five years statistically we're going to have a new superintendent in every school district. That's what that means. Now obviously that's excessive, but our average tenure right now is six or just a little over six years state wide in a school district. The bigger the district, the shorter the tenure. You get into large districts last year the average was four years. But the turnover is coming much more rapidly so that tells me that the jobs are there . . . we have had a lot of districts who only had eight to ten applicants this year.

After that statement many of those in the room voiced the opinion that releasing statistics like those were an immediate "stop." Who would want to plan on moving or changing jobs every four to five years? Further, who would want to buy and sell property that often? Several

participants shared their experiences with trying to secure appropriate housing. One ventured, "I mean there is no way people can get ahead financially if they move all the time. You're paying more and more for a house." He went on to say,

especially in small districts when you're expected to move into the district and you buy a house and then you can't sell it. Most especially in a small place and having been in that kind of experience moving from one job to another anyway, there is no way I will ever buy property if I went to be a superintendent in a small district. I might even be willing to do that for the experience for a lateral pay move, but I know that it wouldn't pay for me to buy property in the district because the likeliness of selling again -- you have one person you can sell it to, who is your replacement perhaps, if you're lucky." Another participant offered a suggestion that he had witnessed, his colleague who had just taken a superintendent's position in a small town had been given a house to live in, one owned by the district.

Minority

Although gender did not rank as a significant barrier in the overall survey, when the data was tabulated by the responses of women only it ranked as very significant. Several of the women in the discussions spoke to this, one quite passionately saying:

I'm a minority woman. I have a doctorate. I'm not going anywhere. I'm sorry. You're not looked at. You have to have a lot more and a lot more of everything and a lot on your record. And I can speak to that because I do a lot of the phone calling and talk to those board members, and I know how they feel. And they have problems telling me how they feel about women when there's a woman asking them the questions. They're very open about who they want, and what they want to happen in the district.

However, the most dramatic and strongest voices in support of women came from their male colleagues. The ones that had worked side by side with them. Two of them described the following:

Whether we want women, like it or not, the people that are doing the hiring are the five people on the board. Apparently the only requirement for people to be a decision-maker is be alive and live in the district. I'm not being critical. I have five really good

people right now. But I'm looking at them and I see four of them that would struggle with can 'she' make that tough decision? Can 'she' be tough enough to let go (fire) a teacher or principal? (It's) unfair because I work for a great woman principal. She's tough. She could do whatever she wants. She runs a great school." And "I happen to work for a lady superintendent who I would say is as good as any superintendent anywhere. She's wonderful. I think a big part of it is the recent superintendent struggles. The board's receptiveness to it. We happen to have a board that is pretty open. However, I do think that if you go into rural Iowa there is a little different mindset. I have a father-in-law who has made the comment to me, 'Doesn't it bother you to work for a woman?' I said, 'No, but it would bother you.' The unfortunate thing is there are lots of people like that out there.

An administrator who had recently moved to Iowa, but was well aware of the issues surrounding women administrators, gave high praise to his former superintendent:

The best person I ever worked for was a woman superintendent in Minnesota. She answered every question that you had about anything. She brought a caring, kindness and calming effect to the district that no one else could ever have brought. The headlines in the local newspaper were, 'Can she do the job?'

Research studies as well as "on the street" knowledge gives high marks for networking being one of the tools professionals effectively use to advance their careers. One principal felt that women are shortchanged in two important arenas,

I feel that people who really want to know and really look at people fairly would find there are all kinds of women out there breaking the stereotypes, but that doesn't get communicated. . . . It really isn't part of some of those standard ways of operating; for instance, if you go into an organization for activities directors, there is one female . . . that's a place where lots of networking goes on. I mean women are totally shut out. That's just the way it is.

Ethnic Classification issues ranked at the very bottom of major significance as reported from the survey, but minority candidates in the focus forums were adamant about its impact. They viewed the state as not ready to even address minority candidates or issues. One stressed:

I am limited because of the very fact I am a minority. And I don't think that from the minority perspective that the state is ready. And when I say state, obviously I'm talking about local boards aren't ready to hire a minority to head the district. From my perspective when I survey my minority colleagues, I see that they feel the same way. I think it's going to be a long time before the State of Iowa reaches that point. And that's a real concern to me.

Expanding on that same theme, another participant addressed the issue from the standpoint of how involvement with minorities affects Iowa's students. He was very concerned that they do not have the opportunity to interact with minorities in positions of high authority, particularly in our schools. He felt that was not preparing them to fully understand or work with the population they would meet beyond the borders of Iowa:

I've been in this state for 35 years, I mean, as an educator, and I've invested a lot to this state, and I'm ready to say that one of Iowa's best kept secrets is the demographics in terms of how it's changing, but it's also been stated the one of Iowa's best imports is its students. And I have a great concern that we're not preparing our students to be able to go out and face a global market, if you will, a world that is reversed, and they're not being able to deal with those kinds of things because they haven't come in contact with minorities in any way, shape, form or fashion.

During their comments, related to minority administrators, the minority participants talked about where they would like to serve, "minority administrators tend to choose or gravitate to schools where there are large minority populations because they feel a strong sense of attachment, commitment, and responsibility to minority students and their education." And passionately sharing their need, desire, and drive to serve, but knowing that as a minority their opportunities for top leadership in Iowa are very limited so must they leave the state. One participant lamented, "I'm not going to get a real good look in the State of Iowa . . . look at the decision I have to make."

Budget/Salary

In dealing with money issues the participants touched on two important areas--budget, particularly as viewed with Iowa's complicated finance formula, and superintendent's salaries. Putting it very succinctly, an administrator gave this account:

I put down finances as number one for stress on the job. Right now stress is very high because of negotiations and only a certain amount of money for programs and that's why I have to leave early because of a finance committee meeting. To me, my time in Iowa finance has been the biggest frustration. Is it the lack of money or is the reason I don't want to be a superintendent is I'm intimidated a little bit by the school finance formula?" When I did my internship I asked the superintendent, 'What's the quickest way to get fired?' He said, 'Screw up the money.' He said, 'there are lots of other things you can do that may create controversy and stress, but if you screw up the money you'll be out in a heartbeat.'

Some of the administrators thought they might opt for a larger district where there would be help with the finances perhaps a full-time business manager. However, one person spoke up right away and cautioned:

It would help but you're still ultimately the buck stops here. I have a gal that's been there 13 years, and she really knows what things are about. That isn't just from me, that's from other people who have been around . . . I can talk to her. I can close the doors and it won't be in terms that I don't understand. I have been through a workshop down at the Department of Education and after I listened to it I was more confused. It isn't because they didn't try. It's because it's a very confusing process.

Another felt that he had been well prepared, but his experience in learning was more of a hands-on situation.

I feel I was fortunate because I took every finance class I could take at the Ph.D. level from a superintendent who was an expert. At the time I was taking it, I was writing a budget, so I had a way of applying what I was learning, and I think that is not common . . . I think that the level of preparation is not at the level it should be in most programs.

Turning toward the others in the forum, one participant ventured: "Not many of us have spent more than one day in the business world, so we just don't have that feel for the business part of it all." Another chimed in, "My money management experience is from saying no. I'm a martyr at the building level. It's always no."

The word mentorship, as it had in the exploratory interviews and the survey, kept coming up in the discussion of finance. One administrator said, "The real simple thing for me was my first principal's job the superintendent kind of helped me because he knew I kind-of wanted to do something like a superintendent in the future so he involved me in all the finance stuff. It was very positive." Another voiced it in this manner, "In my mind you hit it on the head with mentorships . . . I think that would help the security of people. You know just somebody to say, 'hey, I'm there for you anytime, just call.'"

Not all the money talk was on budget. Dollars came up as red flags in several areas for those wishing to be superintendents. One was on the issue of pay to be a superintendent. A participant described his experience as a candidate in applying for a job:

I went to take a look at a district, and I would have had to take a \$10,000 pay cut, not that I make a huge salary, but they were only looking at paying maybe \$60,000 to be a superintendent. I was already making somewhere in that ballpark. And I think that is the decision you've got to make. Do I want to be a superintendent and take a pay cut to do that, and I don't have enough experience to get a bigger school. You're kinda caught in a spot there if you make a move.

Another candidate said it this way,

I know building principals and central office administrators who pretty much in large districts can't take a superintendency in Iowa because there's not enough of a salary jump to make it worth their while. If they are making \$75,000 to \$85,000 as a large school principal or associate superintendent, there aren't that

many superintendencies in Iowa that are going to be much more significant.

The other side of the pay issue is that in many smaller communities the superintendent is the highest paid person in town, and as one respondent put it, "It's like a lightning rod because of the salary printed." With a slight edge to his voice another participant gave this account:

...particularly in small communities, it would not be unusual for the superintendent of schools to be perhaps the highest paid individual in the community. And that makes you an easy target. . . . There are a couple of people in our community who go to the board meetings, and every month they pour through the part of the newspaper where we have to print all those school district expenses and go there, and they get their five minutes on TV in front of people and just rip into the extravagant expenses. 'Look at how much he spent on telephone calls.' You know, just stuff like that . . . it would be real hard to sit up at the table with straight face and just nod your head. It really would.

Charter Schools

Although the topic of charter schools only emerged from the third and final focus forum, it carried weight in its importance to this study for the challenge the entire idea of choice has for the superintendency. If administrators can increasingly choose to serve in schools with many less state and federal mandates and with a selected population of students will that siphon of the already dwindling pool of superintendents candidates for the public schools. A major discussion was ignited on this topic when one of the high school principals shared the content of his conversations with colleagues during his recent attendance at a convention that drew administrators from all over the nation. His comments started with:

Guys, I was with someone from Texas who had started his own charter school. So what has happened is he's gotten a reprieve

from following certification guidelines, special education, etc. It's what they call a magnet school that attracts their folks on a special interest, which, he tells me, has lessened his administrative headaches, that he's free to run that show . . . set their goals and guidelines. . . . They don't have to follow the rules. I don't know how far that's going to go. Colorado is really pushing charter schools.

Another principal spoke up at that time saying, "as I listen to my colleagues that have started schools, it lessened the paperwork. They don't have to adhere to all of the contracts, negotiations, unions, special education, certification, rules from the state."

In talking about Iowa, a principal said,

I don't think I have a problem with charter schools or math and science schools, but they should have to live by the same rules within that school. I'm not sure how our government can say that you can have this set of rules at one school, but you must have these rules at this school. You can do whatever the heck you want, but I am frustrated, and I think most people in management positions are frustrated with the inability--just like a board of education is frustrated with the inability to make the decisions that might impact our school.

In a heated manner another principal, pointing with his hand said, "You go down this road about half a mile, take a right, go down, and there's a school right there that I have kids that used to go to my school go there. They don't even have certified teachers. And they're not following the rules. In my estimation government is giving them more and more money as opposed to us."

As the discussion continued on rules and regulations, Chapter 1 was brought up. A participant noted, "In frontier schools, teachers are not part of Chapter 1. If that's so innovative, then why do we have the rest of the schools as part of collective bargaining. . . . That's perceived by those lawmakers as good. Great opportunities for you people. The rest of you people stay with collective bargaining." One of

the principals added to that thought, "I think your good, creative teachers would say, 'I want to give that one (charter school) a try.' You'd have people standing in line for it. And I think I would have people standing in line being a superintendent for the charter school because of the rules and regulations."

Positive Aspects of the Job

Not all of the rhetoric focused on the negatives of taking a superintendent's job. Participants when asked were able to delineate some positive aspects to being the head of a school district. Most talked about respect and the ability to have an impact on adults, students, and the community. One principal said it this way:

You have an opportunity to be an educational winner . . . you can put together a staff development program that will help individual teachers improve, and when individual teachers improve, instruction improves. When instruction improves, kids are impacted. That's what it is all about.

Another participant felt that the impact of the superintendency rested with the individual knowing his/her role. He stated his beliefs in this manner:

I think the challenge of coming together and to energize everything that goes on in the school district to focus on something that is really going to make things better for kids. Doing it for everyone in the community is what the challenge is all about, and I think as a superintendent probably one of the biggest challenges in defining your role. Different people want so many different things from you that that in itself might be intriguing.

On a very positive note, a participant stated her belief that superintendents, "can have an impact on changing the direction of education." She went on to say, "I think that is one of the challenges I see of the position. It is a great challenge, but I think of the impact

it can have on the community as a whole, not just education in a community but getting involved in the direction that schooling as a whole goes. It's important to build. If you will take the time to do that, I think you will be rewarded."

Another participant commented on the superintendent's ability to empower people to do something that everyone wants done, like a five-year vision or building new classrooms as probably the most rewarding thing that happens. All the participants in various ways voiced their opinion that the superintendency was a "great leadership position."

As mentioned in the introduction to the findings, there were several noteworthy discussions that took place. They were not at the level of themes because themes transcended all three forums and/or received multiple comments from most of the participants in the forums. Those discussions are included here for their ability to add to the understanding of the superintendency.

Retirement

A participant was lamenting the fact that most of his colleagues in administration were leaving the state. He gave a lengthy account of what he was concerned with in regards to administrators being vested in retirement benefits:

Three or four years down the road, they're going to work for UNI because of the separate retirement system, going to work for Drake University, and they have a separate retirement system, Buena Vista University they have a separate system. I have colleagues that are leaving the state. They're going to leave and be vested in another retirement system. Just seems to me what we're losing is the people who have the experience. They have all the network of Iowa. They know Iowa, but they're being stolen by Arizona, Nevada, Alaska, you know, all these states.

He went on to say that boards here in Iowa, then, are willing to pay money to pay the retirement system and pay those things off for out of state candidates coming here, but not do the same to keep candidates in the state. He claims there has to be a good creative way to use retirement as an incentive for candidates. One suggestion he did give was to have the Iowa School Board Association start their own separate retirement system. It would say to candidates,

Instead of going to Nevada or Wisconsin or Illinois, stay here and you can start being vested in that. You don't have to go to work for UNI. I have two colleagues that are going to be going to work for UNI as student teacher coordinators. At the tenure period, they're going to have more invested in retirement then I have in IPERS. I'm saying that's an incentive.

Secondary Status

The moderator commented that most of the current superintendents for the state had come from the secondary principals' positions. Participants were asked why they believed this to be true? A secondary principal said:

I guess my thought process on that is because if you look at the time demands of my job and my counterparts. I'm 7 through 12 and they are K-6. I've got a zillion nights and she's got a few nights. She's happy about that. She's comfortable with it. . . . So I think that's part of it, because I think the secondary is viewed as a more challenging job and if it's more challenging then you are ready to take on the next. I'm not saying it (secondary) is, but we certainly support that with our salary structures.

Another participant was a little hesitant to speak, but shared this thought, "I think a lot of elementary principals and this is really a generalization . . . look at that job as an end to itself. I don't think they strive to go beyond that." Then a third participant ventured a similar thought, "It's a career job for them and that's all they want. An elementary principal really, as I view it, probably has his own

little world or her own little world and can pretty much control what's happening a lot more than a high school principal or even a middle school principal involving outside forces. I know there are problems, I'm not saying that."

At that point in the discussion, someone contemplated out loud that since the elementary job seemed to have a higher degree of job satisfaction than a high school principal's, maybe more high school principals are dissatisfied with their positions and that makes the superintendency seem more attractive to them. One participant spoke up right away, saying, "That's a true statement. I think you might find many superintendents who would say, 'Well, my high school principal thinks he can do my job as well as I can.' Another participant added to that by saying,

Someone asked me, one of my staff members, what I wanted and I said, just once, I want to walk out at 4:00 and stick my head in the Principal's office and say, see you tomorrow morning buddy.' And the point of the matter is, you make some massive decisions as superintendent, but you more often know what's coming and have more time to prepare, where as a principal I have this thing, and it's not really a planner but it's a guesser, because this is what I intend maybe to try to do today, but when I walk in there's two or three things that comes up, whereas my boss lays out a schedule and doesn't have the unplanned arrivals as often.

County System Schools

A participant sparked some intense interest by the other participants in the forum by saying he thought Iowa might have to go back to county schools with county wide superintendents or privatization. He went on to say,

that just two states he was familiar with, Missouri and Lincoln county School, just before he left years ago, they had one superintendent consolidated and did them all. They just did it for the state. The state ran it. We've kind of done that the back door

here in Iowa by decreasing statewide funds per pupil, and it's caused schools to close voluntarily. Illinois as I understand it has elementary and secondary combined, so you would be a superintendent of a K-8 area. I don't necessarily think that's the right way to do it, but I know a lot of districts, a lot of states are experimenting with that type of set up. Missouri dropped, I think they dropped to half the number of superintendents in Lincoln County.

Summary of Focus Group Forums

The participants in the forums, all themselves potential candidates, helped paint a picture of the thoughts of those endorsed to serve Iowa schools as the lead administrator. They accomplished the task of expanding on the information compiled from the surveys completed by the superintendent endorsed population of Iowa. Participants provided their personal insights and supplied specific examples to illustrate the recorded data.

Discussion on the six most significant barriers as ranked by the survey participants opened each forum: Satisfaction with Current Job, Impact on Family, Too Political, Stress Level, Absence of Experience, Instability in Length of Job. Other important barriers and conditions emerged and were also discussed. They included the complexity of the Iowa school budget process, the lack of appropriate compensation to superintendents, the Charter School movement in Iowa and other states, non-support of minority candidates, a provision for a separate retirement system, consideration of county-wide districts, positives associated with the job, and secondary versus elementary status for possible applicants.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was conducted to contribute further understanding to the growing perception that something must be done about the leadership in our nation's schools. The aim was to find out from people who hold the requisite credentials to be superintendent in Iowa, but who were not serving in that position at the time of the study, why they thought that fewer people were choosing to become school superintendents in the state. This chapter discusses the findings of the study, offers conclusions, and suggests possible implications. The chapter concludes with final recommendations for future study.

Discussion

A number of Iowa education professionals who possess a good understanding of the position of superintendent of schools believe there is a shortage of candidates to assume the ever-increasing job vacancies that occur each year. Supporting that belief were the people surveyed for this study. Both the perception and the reality in Iowa mirrors a national trend of a high turnover rate in the superintendent position and there are fewer and fewer people willing to take on the top school leadership job--the superintendency (Johnson, 1996; Kowalski, 1995; Leithwood, 1995). Opinion of the educational community, individuals surveyed for this study, and current research literature all point to an

increasing crisis of leadership. These three sources--opinions, survey data, and current literature--framed the following discussion comments.

Nature of the Job

Would you want your son or daughter to become a superintendent? That was a question put to more than 500 New York State superintendents in a survey in 1998. Only 27% answered "yes" on a survey conducted by Hazard, Young and Attea Associates, a search firm in Northfield, Illinois. Most indicated the job was getting too complex and these superintendent parents felt their job was just not worth it for their child (Abrams, 1998). Compared to the Hazard study a higher percentage of participants from this study thought many candidates resisted getting involved in the superintendency because of the "very nature" of the position.

Participants cited political pressures, the constant demands of high visibility, the struggle in dealing with unstable school finances, the increased controls imposed by court rulings, legislation and state mandates, and the ever-changing faces of their bosses--the local school board. Most agreed with findings from other studies about the constant work demands of the superintendency which results in little time for what many educators feel is the most enjoyable and meaningful component of their profession--having an impact on teaching and learning (Bredeson, 1996; Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Gmelch & Chan, 1995; Hunter, 1997).

A reporter for a local newspaper in Des Moines, Iowa, described the issue well when he wrote an article in 1998 about the hiring of a new superintendent for the district. "The school superintendent's job is

the hottest kitchen in America. The superintendent makes decisions that affect the two things closest to people's hearts--their children and their money" (Bolton, 1998, p. 1). The article went on to quote a spokesperson from AASA who had reported that most school districts today could, at best, expect to receive one-fourth the number of applicants as a decade ago and that the process of finding a replacement might take up to a full year or longer than previously had been the case. Moreover, even if a district received a good number of candidates for a job opening, as one study participant described the process, "the most desirable candidates play musical chairs among districts." This person went on to explain that in Iowa good superintendents--those who possess the skills and experience to do the job--routinely are hired in the most attractive districts. The result is that this does little to attract newcomers to apply for jobs because they know the good jobs will be taken by others and before they can get a really attractive position, they first will need to take an undesirable superintendency which could very well set them up for failure. Using various, yet consistent examples, the participants from this study confirmed this person's observation as well as that of others about how potential candidates simply were not willing to leave their present position to start all over again in a less than desirable location just so they could work their way up the education career ladder (Chapman, 1997; Lutz & Parker, 1993; McAdams & Cressman, 1997).

This concept of inexperienced people having to pay their dues certainly is not the only reason why people are not attracted to the superintendency. As Yee and Cuban pointed out in 1996, school

superintendents typically have a short tenure in any district. Nationally, as well as in Iowa the average turnover rate for superintendents is just a little over six years (Glass, 1992; School Administrators of Iowa, 1997) and it has been well documented that a number of superintendents leave or are asked to leave because of conflict between the superintendent and his/her school board.

In recent studies of the superintendency and certainly throughout this research effort, issues of politics and the political nature of the position were common complaints. Nationally this has meant that in some states and cities politicians or judges have taken control of the public schools (Applebome, 1995). Politics makes it easy to exploit education--every good politician has an educational platform calling for reform (Berliner & Biddle, 1995) and for many superintendents one result of a number of political reforms has been that the person at the top became the scapegoat. Boards and politicians can easily blame superintendents for the perceived failures of a district; they need only rid themselves of the superintendent to display to the public their attempts at accountability and reform. The overall effect is to erode the superintendent's authority in public education (Hunter, 1997).

Participants from this study were well aware of this negative political working environment and several cited graphic examples of their own superintendent's powers being usurped by the members of the local school board. Others confirmed the perception that currently communities and local boards have free reign to question professional educators' expertise and several forum participants voiced their concern about the growing influence board members have on the daily

administration of the district. They agreed with current literature indicating that more and more hands-on management by outsiders was in direct conflict with what they and other educators believed about superintendents being the primary managers of schools because superintendents, not school board members, were more knowledgeable about best educational practice (Bacharach & Mundell, 1993; Larson, 1997; McAdams & Cressman, 1997; Wimpelberg, 1997). Simply put, most participants in this study felt that constant administrative and managerial tensions among current superintendents, their board, and members of the community were not worth the effort or the increased remuneration.

Also challenging this shift in school governance and administration has been the recent development of educational choice opportunities in our nation and Iowa. Parents and school boards in many states can choose to have charter schools, privatized schools, and/or voucher options. Study participants talked about privatization in the form of MBAs and CEOs taking over leadership of schools because business executives often are viewed as being better equipped than educators to handle problems associated with schools' aging infrastructures, information systems, and management accountability (Jones, 1994). Several focus forum participants were well informed of notable instances in other states or cities where local school boards had appointed chief executive officers rather than superintendents to initiate cut-backs and belt-tightening in large districts, or to grant contracts to for-profit firms to run their schools (Archer, 1996; Bradley, 1995). In one focus forum participants held a lively, protracted discourse on how charter

schools had grown in their region. Most of them despite a great deal of rhetoric regarding siphoning off school funds and dismantling public education (Bruno, Finn, Bierlein, & Vanourer, 1998; Charter Schools for Iowa, 1999; Nathan, 1998) felt such new governance approaches could hold particular appeal for potential school leaders of these new entities. It was particularly attractive, they believed, if this meant there would be less state mandates, teacher and staff union negotiations, special education regulations, and teacher certification rules.

Preparation for the Job

Logical questions regarding this leadership crisis issue might be: Are we preparing enough people for the job? Are the preparation programs really preparing the candidates? During the year covered in this study (1996-97) there were five times the number of educators endorsed, or qualified to do the job of Pre K-12 school superintendent than there were vacancies. In that same year two of the four Iowa universities that have superintendent preparation programs indicated no significant decline in the number of students in their institutions who were enrolled in academic programs carrying the Iowa superintendent endorsement. One of the institution administrators reported, however, that only 40% of students in his college's program were actually interested in becoming a superintendent (Villanueva, 1997). That same percentage (40%) of people showing a possible interest in a superintendency was found in the survey data for this study and a similar pattern can be found regarding education administration graduate students in other states (McAdams, 1998).

Compounding the issue of preparation are two groups of people-- women and ethnic/racial minorities--who have complicated the preparation and shortage issues surrounding the superintendency. Members of these groups, especially women, are increasing in numbers in the professional training programs but like the participants in this study, much of that increase was at the elementary level, many who indicated little desire for a superintendency. For most of those who did indicate an interest in becoming a superintendent, they believed, however, that oftentimes women are ignored, or disregarded in the hiring process. Remarks from both survey respondents and focus forum participants were similar to numerous leadership studies from the past decade (Bell & Chase, 1993; Chase, 1995; Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996). They saw Iowa's past as prologue-- women teach and men manage our public schools. Furthering this contention a number of women from this study strongly agreed with Brunner's (1997) findings that women characteristically are excluded from the all-male networking opportunities that operate to inform and support candidates for positions. Both male and female focus forum participants agreed that even if women did get interviews they felt that many hiring boards and local communities in Iowa continue to stereotype women as "not strong enough" to handle situations and issues that are an everyday part of the job.

Nationally, minority superintendents have made numerical gains, but mainly in the very large urban districts with enrollments of over 100,000 or more. Most of these are male African-Americans, and their opportunities to be superintendents have developed because their male Caucasian counterparts are reluctant to work in districts characterized

as having many difficulties (Bennett, 1991; Henke, Choy, Geis, & Broughman, 1996). At the time of this study only 1.2% of the superintendent population in Iowa was listed as minority. Both African-Americans who participated in a focus forum saw themselves as viable interview candidates under affirmative action guidelines, but implicitly understood their candidacy as "token candidates" for most districts--large or small. In other words, even if they did get an interview, these two believed that once the hiring process was completed the school board would say they hired the most qualified person for the job and to them "most qualified" in Iowa meant Caucasian American male.

As today's educational leaders are increasingly looked to for leadership and solutions to vexing education and societal problems affecting schools and their outcomes, the preparation and on-going training of superintendents has come under scrutiny. Study participants ranked their superintendent preparation programs relatively high, with 55% of the survey respondents ranking their respective program either a four or a five on a five-point high scale. While most felt generally well-prepared, because of the increasingly complex challenges for school leadership in the coming decade, they knew if they served in the role of school superintendent, that each would need a great deal of help from colleagues and more experienced superintendents in order to be successful in this job. Many offered ideas and suggestions that echoed the alternative curricular and pedagogical designs currently suggested by educational administration scholars (Johnson, 1996; Murphy, 1993; Varhola, 1998) and various national administration organizations (University Council of Education Administration) all which have been

very instrumental of ISSLIC standards and advocate for continuous professional development opportunities that go well beyond the traditional graduate course of study.

In summary, considering the findings from this and other studies indications were fairly strong that getting more people to concentrate on the supply side of the crisis equation, that is recruiting people into traditional graduate pre-service preparation programs, simply will not take care of the superintendent leadership shortage problem(s) in the state.

Current Job

Participants in this study cited a number of factors that they felt were keeping them and others from considering the superintendency. Clearly the nature of the job itself and lack of support when they are on the job contributed significantly to their less than glowing perceptions of the superintendency. Compounding these negative views was the notable finding from this study that a number of survey respondents, as well as focus forum participants, said they were happy, both professionally and personally with their present positions. They liked their jobs, especially the aspect of working with kids. Professionally, they thought they made a difference in education, and they were afraid they would lose that influence with students by becoming a superintendent. As one participant in this study voiced, "I want to be able to sit down and talk to kids or work with them in small groups." Then referring to becoming a superintendent he added, "Holy mackerel, what a boring day it must be if you're just dealing with adults all day long." The idea of leaving a job they enjoyed, where they were well paid

and self-actualized for one that appeared to have little or none of the influence they desired just didn't make sense to participants.

These same sentiments were expressed by a successful former superintendent in Kentucky (Osborne, 1996) when he was trying to explain to his dismayed colleagues his return to the principalship. He shared, "As a principal, I am allowed to witness, touch, and be involved with students. The authentic relationship with students makes the long days, 70-plus hour workweeks, the peaks and valleys, and even the tears worth all the stress. The superintendency simply is not privy to this sensation" (p. 30).

In their personal lives, participants were reticent to uproot their families from communities where they had established good friendships and had spent considerable time and energy building solid professional reputations. In a number of cases, participants said their spouses also had an established career and a move for the superintendent's position would likely mean their spouse would have to start over in a new job, or worse yet not being able to find a job. Most saw moving for a superintendency was simply too risky if it meant going from two incomes to one. An administrator in one of the focus forums, in talking about his family and a superintendency said it this way, "I've been in this district for 26 years. I've had a lot of good jobs, and my wife is a principal in the school district, too. I've got my two kids attending my high school right now, and I like it that way. I really like what I'm doing . . . I like seeing kids and teachers everyday and going to games every year and things like that."

Sometimes it was as simple as the spouse saying, "No!" She/he didn't want to live in the fishbowl life of a superintendent's family. A spouse marries the person, not the position. Yet the job of a public school superintendent, for better or worse, assumes a major presence in their lives. The superintendent and spouse, unequivocally, must be model citizens (Sharp, 1998).

Two broad statements can easily summarize or capsulize the discussion of the study. Right from the complex nature of the job, through the preparation and recruitment for the job, and the poignant reflections on their current jobs, participants in this study voiced grave reservations about taking on the superintendency. Being qualified to do so, take on a superintendent's position, did not translate into being willing to do so, by most of the participants.

Conclusions

1. All 222 participants in this study had the requisite endorsement credentials to serve in the role of a Pre K-12 superintendent in the state of Iowa during 1996-97. Despite their qualifications, the majority of them were not planning to become a chief school executive--a school superintendent.

In the year of this study (1996-97) there were 379 public school districts in Iowa. Three hundred fifteen individuals were identified as people who held a valid superintendent's endorsement, but who were not, at the time of the study, serving as a public school superintendent. Given that all district positions would not be vacant at the same time, or even allowing for shared positions between districts, sheer numbers

imply ample individuals qualified to fill vacancies. Data regarding how many of this population were considering applying for a superintendent's position told a different story. Over 60% of the participants had not, were not, and did not have plans to seek a superintendency anytime in the near future.

2. Participants in the study ranked four of the six most significant barriers to seeking a superintendency as factors they felt they could not influence or control and which contributed greatly to their negative perceptions of the role of school superintendent.

The four barriers participants cited as particularly troublesome and ones which they felt they could do little about were: impact on family, too political, stress level, and instability in the length of time on the job. Most saw all four factors as contributing to a high-risk situation which they were not sure would be worth the effort, or in the long run be a good professional move for them and their families. In fact, satisfaction with their current position was the number one reason respondents gave for not pursuing a superintendency. The current nature of the position with its complexities and demands made the position simply not attractive to many potential candidates.

3. Those participants in this study who indicated they were potentially interested in becoming school superintendents expressed a strong desire for professional encouragement and support throughout the hiring process and well into the initial years on the job.

Respondents who said they were currently seeking a superintendent position, as well as those who said they were undecided at the time of the study, indicated they might be encouraged to apply for a position if

they thought that those involved in the hiring process (e.g., search consultants, school boards, selected community members, and school personnel) engaged in honest and sincere recruitment efforts. Further, those same individuals needed to be willing to support the hired candidate while he/she was learning the new job. Most were not so naive as to say they needed to be assured of a position. What they did make clear was that to make it worth their while to even consider leaving a position they liked, then the hiring process and subsequent professional development opportunities had to be taken more seriously than oftentimes is currently the case.

Implications

Considering the findings and conclusions of this study, three broad implications emerged. First, survey data made a strong case for rethinking the position of superintendent. Expanding on this idea were focus forum participants who painted a picture of a superintendent's job as being out of a person's control in terms of demands on time, energy, stress level, politics, and instability of tenure. Those close to the issue of how to attract people to the position believed the issues surrounding the shortage crisis are complex, but that the best solution, or at least one that could potentially reap tremendous long-term benefits, is to modify the work expectations of today's school superintendent. Granted, a realignment of responsibilities would require intensive work with school boards and the public to overcome their strongly held cultural views of how a superintendent must look and must act.

At present potential candidates see they would have too little control or power over important personal job satisfaction considerations (e.g., autonomy, close connection to the overall mission/goals of the organization, professional growth and development) and unless something is done about making these positions more attractive, likely fewer and fewer educators will consider this job. If the conclusions of this study prove accurate over time, educators will continue to get endorsed to become school superintendents, but the numbers of those applying for vacancies will continue to decline. Merely getting more people into the pipeline and recruiting them into traditional higher education or re-licensing professional development programs seems not the answer. Instead, it appears that the job itself needs changing, or at a minimum people both inside and outside the educational community will need to make a good faith effort to alter their expectations for the job of today's school superintendent. If these changes aren't made it could be that future educators' response to what would attract them to become a superintendent will be as one survey respondent clearly stated--"Nothing on God's green earth!"

The second implication follows the first, but points more specifically to the fact that since the first half of the 20th century state policy makers and the education community have thought it important that those who lead the schools have a strong background and experience in teaching and learning (Carter & Cunningham, 1997; Chapman, 1997). If the findings for this and other studies hold steady into the next decade then it's reasonable to consider efforts will be made to seek candidates from outside the education community. Recently state

legislators, including Iowa lawmakers have investigated and seriously considered eliminating the endorsement requirement that a superintendent must hold a professional educator's license (Jones, 1994; School Administrators of Iowa, 1999).

Considering the reality and perceptions of the complex nature of the current superintendent position, it may indeed be argued that professionals who are not career educators might be better suited for this leadership challenge. Politicians and lobbyists know and understand the politics of school reform; business executives have expertise in downsizing budgets, managing personnel, and building facilities; lawyers have become permanent fixtures in every district's constantly expanding legal entanglements. No one is refuting the need for excellent leadership for our nation's public schools. What might be different in future decades, however, is that those who lead the nation's public schools will not look and act like the superintendents of old--educators will be in the classrooms with the school superintendent position being held by business managers and/or legal and political experts.

The third and final implication has to do with how participants in the study perceived the current hiring process and what happens after a person gets the position. For the participants who spoke about these issues, they explained they didn't want to fill out applications or go through interviews when informal decisions on hiring had already been made by districts. For women and minorities this perception was expressed even stronger in that they were not interested in being mere "tokens."

Viewed as equally important to the hiring was opportunity for professional growth. In order to qualify for a superintendent endorsement in Iowa typically one needs approximately 10 years experience in schools, plus at least two additional endorsements in a chosen field of expertise. Even though participants were professional with many years' experience, they were well aware that no matter how good they were in their previous positions, they fully understood taking on the top leadership position would require specific on-the-job training in order for them to succeed. Most saw learning how to handle the politics, conflict, and increased societal demands of today's superintendency would need to come from people in the position--current superintendents.

Many indicated, however, that their experience in traditional mentoring programs was not particularly successful because of insufficient resources and the availability of good mentors. What many portrayed as a renewed call for good mentoring programs might better be described as a call for a totally new kind of learning for superintendent job preparation and on-going professional development. Professional organizations that serve superintendents at both the national and state level have begun tentative forays into the continuous development arena and some colleges are now providing postgraduate courses specifically for veteran administrators (Varhola, 1998). These, as well as additional efforts from school board associations to educate board members on superintendent's needs for consistent, high quality leadership development activities, and state departments of education to provide financial resources were seen as necessary implications from

this study. Indeed, if system-wide entities will work together on the problems of recruiting and sustaining new school superintendents in Iowa, the position may well contribute to the education of future generations. If this does not happen, what we know and understand today about the Pre K-12 school superintendency, may be very different in the future.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. The literature reviewed for this study indicated a growing national concern regarding who will serve as the future leaders in our Pre K-12 public schools. Indications are that fewer and fewer people are interested in serving as school administrators, especially as the school superintendents. This study focused on the perceived leadership shortage in only one state; additional studies of other states could contribute additional information and insights regarding this national leadership crisis.

2. Current hiring statistics indicate that school principal positions are undergoing similar trends as those cited in this study. Fewer people are currently attracted to taking on the responsibilities of a school principal and a similar study of people endorsed for Pre K-6 as well as 7-12 school principalships in Iowa could contribute to the dialogue and interest regarding the leadership crisis in the state.

3. Candidates who were either definitely interested, or possibly interested in seeking a superintendent's position, said that the people they trusted most to tell them the "real story" about the position were those people who currently serve as school superintendents. A study of

how current superintendents both formally and informally portray their roles and the day-to-day challenges, opportunities, and rewards of their job is warranted. Results from such a study could be used by professional administrators' training programs and for planning and implementing excellent mentoring and professional development opportunities for both in-service and pre-service administrators.

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Appendix A

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

1997-98
SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS OF IOWA
 Superintendent Shortage Survey

For the following items, please put a \checkmark in the blank to the left of the choice that best describes you.

- ☐ I have applied for a superintendent's position but have never been offered or accepted one. (Please complete A-C and Items 1-36)
- ☐ I have never applied for a superintendent's position. (Please complete items C and 23-36.)
- ☐ I have been a school district superintendent, but I am currently in another position.
 (Please complete A-C and Items 23-36.)

A. How many positions have you applied for in the last 5 years?

- ☐ A. 1-5 ☐ C. 9-11
- ☐ B. 6-8 ☐ D. Above 11

B. Are you currently seeking a superintendent's position?

- ☐ A. Yes ☐ B. No

C. Will you be seeking a superintendent's position in the near future? (e.g., within 5 Years)

- ☐ A. Yes ☐ B. No

Please indicate the significance to which each of the following has been a barrier to your seeking or securing a position as a superintendent by placing the number of your response choice in the blank to the left of each item. Response choices are:

1 = No 2 = Below Average 3 = Average 4 = Above Average 5 = Major
 Significance Significance Significance Significance Significance

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Inability to Relocate | <input type="checkbox"/> 9. Nearing Retirement | <input type="checkbox"/> 16. Twelve Month Assignment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Isolated Nature of the Position | <input type="checkbox"/> 10. Insufficient Salary | <input type="checkbox"/> 17. Requisite Doctoral Degree |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Excessive Time Commitment | <input type="checkbox"/> 11. Lack of Resources | <input type="checkbox"/> 18. Lack of Information on Jobs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4. Gender | <input type="checkbox"/> 12. Lack of Support | <input type="checkbox"/> 19. Insufficient Retirement System |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 5. Impact on Family | <input type="checkbox"/> 13. Too Political | <input type="checkbox"/> 20. Ethnic Classification |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6. Stress Level of Job | <input type="checkbox"/> 14. Restricted Networking Opportunities | <input type="checkbox"/> 21. Absence of Superintendent Experience |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 7. Satisfaction With Current Job | <input type="checkbox"/> 15. Complexity of School Budget Formula | <input type="checkbox"/> 22. Negative Perceptions About the Superintendency |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 8. Instability in Length of Job | | |

23. Your Current Position (Please check all that apply.)

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A. Teacher | <input type="checkbox"/> E. High School Principal | <input type="checkbox"/> I. AEA |
| <input type="checkbox"/> B. Assistant Principal | <input type="checkbox"/> F. Assistant Superintendent | <input type="checkbox"/> J. DE |
| <input type="checkbox"/> C. Elementary Principal | <input type="checkbox"/> G. Superintendent | <input type="checkbox"/> K. Other _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> D. Middle/Jr. High Principal | <input type="checkbox"/> H. Higher Education | |

24. Your Gender (Check One.)

- ☐ A. Female
- ☐ B. Male

25. Your Age (Check One.)

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A. Under 35 | <input type="checkbox"/> E. 51-55 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> B. 36-40 | <input type="checkbox"/> F. 56-60 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> C. 41-45 | <input type="checkbox"/> G. 61 or Above |
| <input type="checkbox"/> D. 46-50 | |

Continued on Back

26. Race/Ethnic Classification
(Check One.)

- ☐ A. African American
☐ B. Asian
☐ C. Caucasian
☐ D. Hispanic
☐ E. Native American
☐ F. Other _____

27. Your Highest Degree
(Check One.)

- ☐ A. Doctorate
☐ B. Specialist
☐ C. Masters

28. I Plan to Retire In:
(Check One.)

- ☐ A. 1-3 Years
☐ B. 4-6 Years
☐ C. 7-9 Years
☐ D. 10 Or More
☐ E. No Current Plans

29. How do you or have you secured information about superintendent job openings? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ A. Professional Organizations (SAI, IASB, AEA)
☐ B. Newspapers
☐ C. College Placement Bureau/Professors
☐ D. Search Consultants
☐ E. Colleagues
☐ F. Professional Publications (e.g., Ed Weekly)

30. From which of the following have you gathered your perception of the superintendency? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ A. Current Superintendents
☐ B. Colleagues
☐ C. Professional Publications
☐ D. Professional Organizations
☐ E. Public/ Press
☐ F. Other _____

31. Do you feel your university program adequately prepared you to be a superintendent?

- ☐ A. Yes ☐ B. No ☐ C. Not Sure

32. If you could have made one positive change to your university preparation program for superintendents, what would it have been?

33. What motivated you to secure the superintendent's endorsement? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ A. Desire To Head A District
☐ B. Enhance Job Opportunities, But Not Serve As A Superintendent
☐ C. Required for District Level Position
☐ D. Broaden Knowledge Base
☐ E. Was Included As Part Of Doctoral Courses
☐ F. Other _____

34. Which of these suggestions do you feel will make the greatest impact on alleviating our current shortage of superintendent candidates? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ A. Changes In Administrator Certification And Preparation Programs
☐ B. Review And Rethink The Position Of Superintendent (Salary, Benefits, Time Commitment, Etc.)
☐ C. Public Relations Efforts
☐ D. Identification And Recruitment Of Candidates
☐ E. Changes In Job Postings

35. What suggestions might you add to question #34?

36. What specifically would entice you to seek a superintendent position?

Appendix B
SURVEY COVER LETTER



school administrators of iowa

REGENCY WEST 5, SUITE 140
4500 WESTOWN PARKWAY
PO. BOX 65578
WEST DES MOINES, IOWA 50265-0578
PHONE: (515) 224-3370
FAX: (515) 224-3372

November, 1997

Dear Colleague:

The state of Iowa is facing a serious shortage of school administrators. At a time when the demands for improving the nature and quality of educational experiences for Iowa's young people are greater than ever, fewer and fewer educators are choosing to go into school administration. Unless we take some immediate and proactive steps to address this situation, Iowa will be shortchanging the future of the next several generations.

SAI has initiated several efforts designed to deal with the administrator shortage problem. Working with Elaine Smith, a doctoral candidate at Drake University, we have developed the enclosed survey with which we are asking you to respond.

You have been identified by the Iowa Department of Education as being certified as a school superintendent but not currently serving in this capacity. Your response to this survey is crucial because we are trying to determine the reasons why individuals have gone to the time and expense of becoming certified as a school superintendent but then have chosen not to become or continue as a practicing superintendent.

While we will be reporting a summary of all responses, your individual response will be kept confidential. The results of this study will be invaluable to us as we take a look at licensure requirements, preparation programs, working conditions, and other aspects of being a school superintendent.

Please complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it to us in the enclosed envelope no later than Wednesday, December 17, 1997.

Thank you very much for your help.

Respectfully,

Gaylord Tryon
Executive Director

sai: serving all of Iowa's educational administrators
Affiliated with American Association of School Administrators
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals

Appendix C

FOCUS GROUP FORUM INVITATION

**school administrators of iowa**

REGENCY WEST 5, SUITE 140
4500 WESTOWN PARKWAY
P.O. BOX 65578
WEST DES MOINES, IOWA 50265-0578
PHONE: (515) 224-3370
FAX: (515) 224-3372

March 9, 1998

Dear Colleague:

In the fall of this school year we asked you to complete a survey regarding the serious shortage Iowa is facing in securing school administrators. As always, you did an excellent job of responding, and we now have some significant data surrounding this concern.

However, there are several questions or areas, as a result of the survey, that we believe should be explored in greater depth. Recognizing your commitment to your profession and position as a leader, we believe your insights will answer our additional questions and assist us in designing proactive steps to meet the crisis.

Therefore, you are being invited to take part in a **Focus Forum Group** to be held at the AEA 5, 1235 5th Ave. South, Fort Dodge, on **Tuesday, May 5th, from 6:00-7:45PM**. We will be working again, as we did on the survey, with Elaine Smith, a doctoral student from Drake University. She and I will be facilitating the discussion. Dinner will be provided, and knowing that your time is busy and limited, you will receive a \$50.00 stipend for your participation.

The forum will be recorded simply to capture information for future reporting of the data, and not for specific identification of the participants. If we can count on you, please complete the acceptance information and return it in the enclosed envelope. We look forward to seeing you on May 5th.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Respectfully,

Gaylord Tryon
Executive Director

sai : serving all of Iowa's educational administrators
Affiliated with American Association of School Administrators
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals